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ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN
1905

Mrs. Jim and Mrs. Jimmie

Certain Town Experiences of the Second Mrs. Jim as Related to Jimmie's Wife

By

Stephen Conrad

Author of "The Second Mrs. Jim"

With a frontispiece in colours from a drawing by

ARTHUR W. BROWN

Boston ✒ L. C. PAGE & COMPANY ✒ *Mdcccv*

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MRS. JIM AND MRS. JIMMIE

CHAPTER I.

"'JOHN MAREE'S' CHILDREN'S DAY"

MRS. JIM settled herself more comfortably in the little rocking-chair, and went on with the one-sided conversation. It was her first visit to the farm, and to Jimmie and his wife for a week, and there was so much to hear about the new boy that she had not had a fair opportunity to talk until now, when both the babies were asleep and she and Katie were sitting on the big porch, busy with sewing.

"I do wish you could have been to church last Sunday morning. It was 'Children's Day,' you know, and of course we had exercises. I'll begin at the beginning, though, and tell you all about what we call now '"John Maree's" Children's Day.' I suppose the whole thing was shocking, but I got to giggling before I thought how shocking

it all was, and then it was too late to do anything but giggle.

"You've heard me speak of the Higgins's, I know, though maybe I never did mention their daughter that went to the State university. Before she went, she was plain 'Mary Jane,' with emphasis on the 'plain,' but when she came home at the end of the first year of school, she was 'John Maree,' with the accent on the 'ee.' Of course nobody paid any attention to that, and just thought that she was changing the first name for fear she wouldn't get a chance to change the last one.

"Last year she graduated and got a bachelor's degree, and came home with her trunks and boxes, and I don't know what all, not being near neighbours of her folks. And she didn't hesitate one bit either to tell folks that still called her 'Mary' or 'Jennie,' that she was 'John Maree.'

"She found it pretty lonesome at home, too, hardly any young folks in town, and those all busy. Actually there ain't a single unattached young man in town but the clerk in Moses' Department Store, and the little red-headed carpenter, but that doesn't bother her, for she never has had any beaux.

"Well, as I said, she got pretty lonesome without anything to do, for, as soon as she got home, her mother got a hired girl, and they began putting

on airs, as much as Mrs. Higgins could, for she was a mighty friendly sort, and not stuck up a bit.

"'John Maree,' not having anything else to do, and not being old enough to take up whist or any other card game for a steady pursuit, and not caring for chasing a little white rubber ball over the hills, and calling it fun, and being, besides, real good at heart, took up church work.

"Did you ever notice, Katie, how women, when they don't have any housework to look after, and their children is off their hands, or they ain't ever had any, always look around for something to do? Some take church work, and some take cards, and some take to Rebecca or Woman's Relief Corps work. It's always something. I took them all except the cards. Life is too busy for me to sit down to a table and fool with little pieces of pasteboard.

"'John Maree' had to take second place at church, though, and play second fiddle, for there was an old hand, one of the teachers in the town schools, that had always been running things, and, of course, she wasn't going to give up her rights to any upstart, so 'John Maree' had to be content with helping, and teaching the little shavers pieces for Christmas, and playing the organ for them to practise singing, and then getting down on her

hands and knees and scraping up the mud they tracked in on her mother's carpets, for Mrs. Higgins said she wouldn't hire any girl to clean up after the youngsters. 'They needn't come there, anyway. Let 'em go to the church to practise.'

"But, after working all year at socials, and teaching pieces for the other old maid to cut off the programme the last minute, at last her time came. The teacher was going to be away for 'Children's Day,' and wouldn't have time to do a thing, so 'John Maree' was made chairman of the committee to decorate church and arrange the programme.

"I went around on Saturday afternoon to help fix mottoes and things. I can always help decorate, and make pasteboard letters covered with cotton, and all that sort of thing, and Jim went along to take me, and to drive around to get plants and flowers and run errands generally.

"When I got there, she had her plans all started, and she said she wouldn't need any mottoes, but she did want Jim to bring a lot of plants, and she got him started off after these imitation palms and things that she'd borrowed from a restaurant man down-town, and while he was gone she told me what she planned. She was going to have things different, she said, and instead of having the same

old pieces, and the same old decorations, she was going to have the platform look like a tropical garden. I don't know that she'd ever seen a tropical garden, and yet it did sound pretty when she talked about it. She had the janitor take out the two front pews and run the platform out on the horses we set the tables on for socials, and then she had all those palms (Jim swears there was eight loads) arranged around, and 'massed,' as she called it, against the pulpit, so it did look real fine.

"Then she heard the children speak, and they went through it pretty well, so she looked real pleased and sent them all home. After we had everything fixed, there was her and her mother, and the preacher's wife, who couldn't do much, for she had two youngsters tugging at her skirts, and some of 'John Maree's' Sunday-school class, and three or four regular standbys, that always come around to help, but can't go ahead to save their lives, all sitting down talking. We didn't usually get through so soon, but there weren't any mottoes to fix, for she said she didn't want to spoil the illusion about the tropical garden, and that cotton mottoes would be out of place. When I said I thought cotton would be right in place in a tropical garden, she called me a 'quaint old thing,' and went on raving about her plans. Honestly, do I look like a 'quaint old

thing'? Well, maybe I am. I'd rather be that than a 'John Maree' any day.

"Suddenly she jumped up and gave a little squeal, but she didn't jump on a seat and huddle her skirts around her, so I knew it wasn't a mouse. Then she said, 'Oh, I have it,' and she certainly looked as if she had, but what, I didn't know. She leaned over and whispered in her mother's ear, then in the preacher's wife's ear, then in each one of the standbys' ears, then in my ear. Each said just what I knew beforehand she would say. Her mother said, 'Now, Jennie,' as proud and pleased, and the minister's wife said, 'But would it be proper?' The standbys giggled and said, 'Ain't she the beatin'-est?' to each other. All I said was, 'What for?'

"So she went on to tell. 'Just think what a touch it would lend to the occasion! Just think how new it would be to the poor little dears who had never seen one! And then it would show that we were interested in the man from whom we borrowed.' I didn't say any more. I just thought it was her picnic, not mine. Jim came in then, and she turned to him, 'Oh, Mr. Bell, won't you go with me and help get it?' He looked at me, and I nodded, then he said, 'Go where, and get what?' I wish you could have seen the look on his face when she said, 'Why, down to Johnson's saloon and borrow his

parrot.' Jim's eyes stuck out, and his jaw dropped, but finally she made him understand, and they drove off.

"They got it easy enough, although it was the pride of that saloon-keeper's heart, and he gave them all kinds of directions about swinging up the cage. How carefully it must be wired, and not be hung in a draught, and not to forget to water the bird in the morning. I asked 'John Maree' how she happened to think of it, and she said, 'I was racking my brains to think of some bit of colour that would just fit with these green palms, and that Jerusalem cherry plant, and Mrs. Jenkins's lemon-tree with the lemons wired on, and I happened to think that Mr. Johnson's little girl, who is in my Sunday-school class, told in class one day about her papa's parrot, and how pretty it was, and I knew it was just what we wanted.'

"As soon as they got back, we all went to work, and got that cage hung up on a scantling that we ran out from the choir loft back of the pulpit, and we fastened that whole outfit as tight as wire would fasten. Then we went home.

"The next morning was beautiful, and your pa and I went to church early, for we wanted to be sure of our own pew and to see everybody as they came in. And you ought to have seen the people when

they came inside that door. The looks of tl
form, and the parrot's cage, and the whole
just made their eyes stick out.

"Then old Mr. and Mrs. Martin, who
been to church all winter, they had been so
came in and found their pew, the one they'c
pied for twenty-eight years last February, tak
to make room for the platform. Well, the
tainly was plenty of excitement. And wh
boys began to gather in numbers so their m
couldn't keep their eyes on all of them at onc
could hear little whistles with a peculiar qu
the end, and every time that bird in the bi
cage heard that sound he'd twist his head a
and walk back and forth on his perch and cla
wires. 'John Maree' came in soon, with a gl
water in her hand. She marched boldly up c
platform, and when she got to the cage, pu
finger through the wires to pull the water dish
side. Just at that minute the minister's old
(he's eight) gave that same little quirky
and the parrot grabbed 'John Maree's' finge
squealed and dropped the water all down th
breadth of her dress-reform skirt. The
keeper, Johnson, came in just then, and s
parrot acting that way as he walked down
very front seat with his little girl, so he marc

on to the platform in his long black coat, with a bright red tie, and a diamond stuck in it, and said something to the parrot, and the bird quieted down.

"The minister came in then, and the choir climbed up in the loft, Mark Williams in his wheel-chair being wheeled up by a boy he has to wait on him Sundays. Then 'John Maree' walked out on the platform in her worst-looking dress-reform dress, all splashed, and the 'Children's Day' exercises began. It was just like all that sort of thing, only more tropical and flowery than ever, and the people were sitting there trying not to go to sleep. I had the Martins in our pew, and they were dozing on one side, and Jim nearly snoring on the other. It was a hot day, and from the first hot Sunday on he nearly always goes to sleep.

"At last, everybody was wishing that the line of plump little girls and fat little boys that were saying their pieces in the same singsong, would hurry up and get through, when a little girl came shyly up on the platform. Her piece was hardly the thing, anyway, being 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' and here it was broad daylight on a June morning, but I heard her mother telling how well she spoke that, so 'John Maree' had let her say that instead of learning a new one. As she came on the platform she eyed the parrot's cage, and edged her way past

it till she got to the middle of the platform, where she was stopped by 'John Maree's' low 'There, that will do. Now — ' and the little girl started out instead of 'Twinkle, twinkle,' with 'Now I lay me down to sleep.' Then, as she heard her teacher's voice saying, 'Twinkle, twinkle, — ' she suddenly went on, 'Twinkle, twinkle, little — sheep.' Everybody giggled at that except the preacher and his wife, who looked shocked. At that, still with her head twisted to one side, and her eyes on the parrot's cage, the youngster threw one arm across her face, and, crying at the top of her lungs, started across the platform away from the bird. Not seeing where she was going, she missed the steps that led down to the floor, and threw herself right on to the broad bosom of old Mrs. Oates, who sat pretty well up under the edge of the platform, half-asleep. Both were rescued by the people around, and the audience rested itself and got over its laughing by standing to sing 'Hymn number four hundred and twenty-five.'

"The next speaker was little Becky Johnson, the saloon-keeper's daughter, and his face shone as bright as his diamond as she flounced up on to the platform, spread out her skirts, and began her piece. The first verse she got through with, swaying back and forth to keep time to her words, but she broke

down on the next, and while she waited, and 'John Maree' turned over and over the paper she had the pieces copied on in a useless hunt for that one piece, up from the back of the room came that little quirky whistle, and the parrot woke up, and began his hoarse croakings and clawings at the bars. This threw little Becky completely off, and she retired to her father's arms in tears, while he looked around to see where that whistle so familiar to him and his bird came from, for he used to hang the cage at the front door of his saloon till the boys nearly drove the bird crazy with that peculiar little quirky whistle which the parrot had just heard.

"The next thing on the programme was a song by the infant class, and they marched up on both sides, little girls in curls and stiff white dresses, little boys in creaky shoes and with plastered hair, and once in a while a larger boy, with a stupid face, that showed why he was with them. Then they sang.

"It was about half-way through the programme, as I knew from having heard the pieces the day before, and I was getting tired, for the church was hot even with the windows open, and it was pretty crowded in our pew with the Martins and Jim and me. Finally they got done singing, and the children were marching off the platform, half of them on each

side, the ones that had to pass under the cage ducking and looking scared as they passed, till it got to the last boy, a big, slow, stupid fellow, too big for that class, but too stupid for the next class. He was looking out the window and ran smack into the cage. Just then, clear and shrill from just outside the window where one of the boys had climbed a tree after being chased out by the ushers, came that same little quirky whistle.

"The shaking of the cage, and the bumping, and the whistle all combined, seemed to wake up that bird thoroughly, and he proceeded to wake up everybody else. 'John Maree' was just starting across the platform to stop the swinging of the cage when the first words came, and after that there was no stop. The bird certainly had a good memory, for every oath that had ever been used in that saloon was stored up in that bird's head, and he reeled them off as fast as his tongue could fly. And the expressions on people's faces! 'John Maree' stood stock-still, her face getting as white as this muslin. The preacher in the front seat leaned back in holy horror. Johnson's face got as red as his tie, and the boys in the congregation were all one broad grin.

"Everybody began to fly around like as if they were crazy, and the preacher and Johnson started for the platform at the same time, and ran into each

other, and 'John Maree' fainted on the platform in spite of her dress-reform dress, and all over that house came that same little whistle from every boy there. Johnson climbed over the preacher and got to the platform, and tried to take down the cage, but it was wired fast, and the parrot reached through the wires and nipped his fingers. He tried then to beat the parrot at swearing, but the bird started up again, and the man didn't have a ghost of a show. The bird had the best of it from the start. By this time the preacher had got up to the cage and was ordering the saloon-keeper to remove that 'vile bird' and himself from the 'holy house.' On the other side of the platform a couple of women were working over 'John Maree,' but her clothes were so loose it wasn't any use loosening them any, and there wasn't any water nearer than the pump out in the yard. Little Becky Johnson, thinking since it was their parrot, that she was responsible, was hovering around, while the same quirky little whistle was kept up just as regular from outside the window. By this time the whole church was bubbling over, and rolling in their seats, except what were hustling around trying to unfasten the bird-cage. I suppose we should have been shocked, but the giggles got us first, and it's pretty hard to pretend to be shocked when you're full of laugh.

"The preacher kept ordering Johnson to remove that bird, and at last the saloon-keeper got so mad, what with the parrot's bites every time he'd touch the cage, and the preacher's worrying him, that he pulled off his coat before everybody, and started to roll up his sleeves. And there in his hip pocket was a whiskey bottle, about quart size.

"Everybody was telling everybody else what to do, and talking all at once, and the parrot's voice was getting higher, and he was repeating all he'd said before, and making it twice as strong. Suddenly I saw little Becky, who had been wringing her hands at seeing her 'dear teacher' lying there in a faint, rush up to her pa, where he stood with his back to her, and pull out that whiskey bottle. Before anybody could do anything but stare, she pulled out the cork with her teeth and poured about half the bottle, it seemed like, between 'John Maree's' lips. Then some one snatched the bottle away from her. I thought from the way 'John Maree' began to cough that she'd choke to death, but it certainly brought her around quick.

"The parrot still kept on swearing till Becky grabbed her father's coat where it lay on the floor of the platform, and wrapped it around the cage. It muffled the noise some, and the preacher started to take off his coat. His wife sat next to me across

the board, and I saw her waving her hand at him not to take off his coat, and heard her murmur, it sounded like, there was so much noise, but I really suppose she was shouting, 'Don't take off your coat, Orlando. Remember —' but he had off his coat, and we all saw what there was to remember. Both sleeves half torn out of his shirt and three buttons off his vest. I didn't wonder at it any, for his wife, with six children, the oldest only eight, certainly doesn't get time to keep him up in shape, and they can't afford to hire anything done. But it was too late now, so his coat, too, went around the cage. Then shawls and wraps were handed up and wound around the cage, while through all came the awful croaks and terrible oaths of that bird, so stirred up that even Johnson, who had recovered his bottle, and under cover of the biggest palm was taking a bracer, had given up trying to stop him.

"At last, Mark Williams in his big bass voice started the doxology, and the preacher raised his hands up so his vest gapped and the holes in his shirt showed worse than ever, and pronounced the benediction, while the parrot, all muffled, kept on swearing, and 'John Maree,' on one side the platform, coughed and coughed, and made faces over the whiskey with which she had been showered, while Johnson leaned against the choir loft and

glowered at the congregation and the preacher on the other.

"How we ever got out of the church I don't know, but my sides have ached from laughing ever since, and I never expect to see 'John Maree' again without I think of her looks when she heard that bird swear, and I ain't going to forget the preacher's disreputable condition, either. Something will surely have to be done for him.

"The children have been teasing Becky so I'm afraid she'll stop coming to Sunday school. And I heard Johnson was going to raffle off that parrot. I guess I'll have to take a couple of chances on him. What do you think? He certainly would be company."

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTDOOR QUILTING

"And how is the new baby, Mrs. Bell?"

The woman at the head of the quilt repeated her question twice, but received no answer. She expressed no surprise at this, for in the two years and a half since Mrs. Jim Bell had moved from the country and joined their church, the women had grown quite used to her ways, among them her habit of carrying on one-sided conversations. This she was doing now, and the woman next her at the far end of the quilt, which was rolled down to a width easily covered by one person's ability to reach, was apparently enjoying to the fullest extent what she was hearing.

The quilt was resting on the backs of chairs in the shade of the elm-trees in the churchyard, for this warm day in mid-June was giving the first opportunity for outdoor quilting. The warmth of the weather had brought out many of the sterling quilters who had not dared to risk the danger of

pneumonia by working in midweek in the church, which, even on Sundays during winter, scarcely lost its chill. The best of these and those least able to endure any possible draughts were working indoors rushing to finish some of the numerous pieces of work promised for June weddings. Two quilts, however, less choice, so that no one feared taking them out-of-doors to work on, had been moved into the yard, and a half-dozen or more were busy on these. Others whose quilting was so notoriously poor that they could not be trusted to put stitches even into the poorer pieces of work, but who were unable to withstand the temptations of the first outdoor, all-day quilting, were flying around getting a lunch ready for the workers, or washing the dishes for use at the social and supper to be held that evening.

As the editor of the *Banner* had expressed it in return for tickets for himself and four children, "The ladies of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, after an all-day, outdoor quilting, to which all who pride themselves on their ability to wield the needle are invited, will serve one of their delectable dinners at the church on Wells Street, on Wednesday evening next, from 5.30 to 7.00 P. M., to which, also, all are invited."

Mrs. Jim had cast her lot with the outdoor work-

ers, and had chosen her seat at the end of the quilt nearest the church door, and facing the street, so that all that passed might be seen, and yet near enough to command the entrance to the church. Now that she had finished the story to the woman on her right, the woman at the other end of the quilt caught Mrs. Bell's eye long enough to repeat her question.

"The baby? Why, he's just the best ever. I thought Bessy was about the sweetest youngster I ever did see, but little Jimmie is still sweeter."

"What, another Jimmie? Won't you get 'em mixed, with three in the family?" The questioner had to speak rapidly to get a word in.

"Well, I suppose they thought since they named Bessy after me that they ought to name the boy after Jim. Only my name isn't Bessy, nor even Elizabeth, but just plain Betsey. And my mother used to say if ever a name fitted, mine did. It seems as if some names just fit right down to the finest point, and others will just fit most anybody. Now, Jimmie's Katie! Why, her name just fits. I can't tell you how, but it just seems to fit. And Margaret Lee! Doesn't her name suit her to a T? And Mary Jane Higgins? Isn't she a regular Mary Jane, in spite of her fancy 'John Maree'? And with men's names it's just the same. Take my Jim.

Doesn't that fit? And Mark Williams? If he wasn't Mark he'd have to be John. No other name would fit. But I think we have some of the most unfit names right here in the church. Take Rose Budd Flint, for instance. Tall, and lean, and white, she ought to have been called 'Sparrow-grass,' instead of wasting a pretty name like that. I suppose they did it just because her mother was a Budd. How would Lily have been? Lily Budd? I think people ought to be allowed to change their first names when they don't fit. Take Montmorency Marmaduke Mudd! I don't wonder he signs himself just M. M. I don't know just what name would fit, but it certainly isn't Montmorency Marmaduke! Sometimes I think white folks up here is as bad as the darkies down South. Remember that mountain missionary that stayed at our house last winter? He was telling me some of the names he ran across down there, white folks as well as darkies. I remember one or two of them. I had to learn them just like a piece to speak, though. Here's one. 'John Divine Communion Cease Old Noah And Little Family Released Stone Cut Out Of The Mountain Hallelujah Robinson.' And the other is 'Magnus Hardcastle Stonewall Jackson Robert E. Lee Rittenoul Berry Judd Carpenter.' They called him 'Judd' for short. And the other was 'John

Divine.' I guess their folks must have been the ones they tell the story about. Somebody asked an old mammy why she gave all those fancy names to her boy, and she said, 'Why, when they call his name in the police court, I don't want him to be ashamed of his namin'.' "

She stopped long enough to reach across for a pair of scissors, then went on:

"But I started out to tell you about little Jimmie. One thing I'm mighty glad of. He's got brown eyes, or I suppose he's going to have, for his hair is just as dark and thick and long! Why, it's almost long enough to braid. But if he does have brown eyes I'll be right glad, for Jimmie's mother had brown eyes, though both he and Frankie have blue, and I'd like for little Jimmie to look like his own grandmother.

"Why, there comes Mrs. Simms. And without one of the young ones! Well, I'm thankful she can get away from them once in a while. It's no more than fair that he should take care of them part of the time. They're his as much as they are hers, and she has to have them when they're little, and when they're sick, and cross, and he sees them only when he chances to want to. That's where a preacher has an advantage over other men. When he wants to get away if the children are sick, or if

his wife wants him to do his share of the bringin up, he can always plead sermons, and his wife give in. I wonder that the preachers' wives don't jus hate to go to church, having to sit and listen to thos old sermons over and over every place the man goe: But I suppose that's better than having him writ a new one every week and be grouchy all week be cause he can't get it to come out right. It must b awful to live with authors, who have to write da after day whether or not they want to. I expec their wives must have a pretty hard time of it.

"Well, Mrs. Simms, it's right nice to see yo without any of the children. You look lots younge I wish your husband could see you now. It's too ba you can't both run away once in a while and ge acquainted over again. Would you mind if I' borrow all the youngsters some day when the leas one gets a little bigger? Then I'll send you and th preacher off out to Jimmie's to spend the day, an we'll see if you don't come back looking ten year younger."

Turning to the woman next her, she whispered, a Mrs. Simms thanked her and passed into the church "You'll notice I didn't say how I'd look, or m house either. I wonder why it is that I like th preachers and their wives, but can't abide th preachers' children. Well, it will give her pleasure.

Rolling the quilt to reduce its size, and to place more of the centre within reach, demanded her attention for a moment, and when she was seated she addressed the woman at the opposite end of the quilt.

" Wasn't that Frank Brown that just drove past? He's putting on airs, isn't he, with a horse to haul his paint-cans and ladders around with? I suppose you'll be having some quilts done for him and Mary one of these days, won't you, Mrs. Parker? They certainly make a fine-looking couple. I saw them together Decoration Day."

" Oh, yes, he's doing pretty well, but — I wish he didn't have to wear such clothes, all covered with paint and paste. Still, I don't see that Mary can do any better here. And we don't want to send her away to school if she comes out like — " and she nodded her head mysteriously toward the church where ' John Maree ' Higgins was busy helping get the lunch on the table.

" Well," replied Mrs. Jim, " I suppose a girl without beaux does have to have something to amuse herself with, but Mary'd have a plenty at school or wherever she was. But ' John Maree ' never had any at home, so she wouldn't have known how to treat them when she did get them. And then to scare them away with that Jenness Miller dress of

hers. Well, all I can say is, I'm glad mine is boys. I don't worry about Frankie at all. He's so busy with his work that he doesn't have time to get any freak ideas in his head. He wrote home once all about his work and I just told him that if he wrote any more such stuff as that I'd quit writing to him at all. Think of his telling about the boys in the laboratory putting fingers off the corpses they cut up in the pockets of folks that come up there, and playing all that sort of jokes. Why, I didn't sleep well for two nights. But, speaking of girls, it depends a good deal on how a girl is brought up whether she gets notions in her head or not. Now her mother was a-dabbling with spiritualism all the time while Mary Jane was growing up, and her grandfather before her was a Millerite. So what can you expect?"

Just then it occurred to Mrs. Jim to get off that subject, for Mrs. Parker herself, having dabbled a little in Christian Science, was now followin' Dowie's movements with great interest, and, bu for the proverbial good health of her family, du as some of the neighbours said, to her inability t cook anything but the plainest food, she woul probably before this have tried his healing power Then, too, Mrs. Bell never liked to speak of ho well her boys were doing before any of the Parker

for the oldest of that family, Ben, had run away from home ten years before, and the family had never forgiven or forgotten the shame. To this day they had never heard from him directly, though one of the town people, who had moved to Oregon several years before, wrote of having seen Ben Parker on a coasting vessel somewhere along the coast.

They were soon called to lunch where it was spread in what were called the church parlours, though for what reason no one ever knew. Mrs. Simms started for home immediately.

"Why," she said, "I didn't realize it was so late. I must get home and get dinner for Orlando and the children. And then he'll worry so if I don't get home. Oh, I'd like to stay, but really I mustn't." But Mrs. Jim met her as she was starting out the door, and calmly turned her around and seated her in a chair.

"Just let Orlando worry, Mrs. Simms. It will do him good. How many times have you kept meals waiting for him, and then he wouldn't come home at all? Probably he's deep in his sermon and would rather not be disturbed, anyway. And we'll send enough lunch for him and all the children when we get done. I brought enough for half a dozen, thinking Jim was coming, but he decided to go out to

the farm to-day after a load of wood, so he won't be here."

They had just started eating when they heard a voice in the hallway, "Ma! Ma Parker! Where be you?" Then a little round head, partly bald, but still showing a fringe of bright red, was stuck in through the crack of the door, and a mild voice said: "Ma, here's a telegram for you!"

"Ma Parker," tall and lean, and with her face drawn into wrinkles by the tightly twisted hair, snapped, "Well, Thomas, who's it from?"

Her husband, venturing within, but holding the door ajar as if ready to dash out at the least sign of trouble, replied: "Why, ma, I didn't open it. Don't you remember how mad you got when I opened the one I got from my brother before you saw it?"

"Well, it's lucky for you that you didn't open my telegram," and with a grand air that set poor Tommy to trembling, and made him swing the doo farther open, she took the telegram from his hanc and felt around for a hairpin, while all the wome wriggled with delight, and wished they might ha the pleasure of opening a telegram before th assemblage.

"I hope it isn't any bad news," ventured M

Simms, while Mrs. Parker snapped at her husband, "How much was to pay?"

"I — it's paid," he stammered, not daring to tell her he had paid sixty cents on the little yellow envelope.

She finally found a hairpin, tore open the yellow envelope, and, after trying twice, secured the right pair of glasses, then calmly read the few words. "Humph!" was her only comment, and she placed the telegram in her pocket and went back to her seat.

"It's all right. You can go on home, Thomas," she said, as she went on with her chicken sandwich.

Poor "Tommy" stood doubtfully at the door. "Why — why — what was it, Maria? Is anybody dead — or anything?" He hesitated to draw down upon his head the lightning of her wrath. "Who's it from?"

"Thomas Carver, this is my telegram, and you can just run along home to your dinner. Mary got it ready, didn't she? There's nothing in this telegram I care to discuss — here." And she flirted her head and looked superior to the amazed women around her.

As soon as lunch was over and a basket had been packed for the preacher and his children, the quilting was resumed, but Mrs. Parker excused herself

after a short time and left. As she sailed down the front walk, one could imagine her ears reaching backward to catch the amazed and indignant remarks of the women she had insulted. A telegram was as common property as a postal-card, and Mrs. Parker was the first one who had presumed to withhold any news from the circle of acquaintances.

CHAPTER III.

MARK WILLIAMS

WHEN Mrs. Jim first came to town to live, she began hearing of Mark Williams. If any one were sick, and the doctors could not agree on his ailment, every one said, "Ask Mark Williams, he'll know." If young people's love-affairs did not prosper, they asked Mark Williams. If church affairs went awry, Mark Williams was interviewed. Thus from many sources Mrs. Jim and any other strangers coming to the little town, heard of Mark Williams until they began to think of him as almost an omniscient, omnipotent being, a little less than the angels, and not always even that. And the most wonderful part of it all was that when they knew him, they never lost more than a shade of the feeling they had absorbed. Truly he was a wonderful man! Had he not led the church choir, and steered the devious course of successful leadership past the rocks of soprano jealousy, and tenor indifference, and alto rivalry? Had he not also acted as superintendent

of the Sunday school for several years without antagonizing a single teacher? As Mrs. Jim put it in telling Katie, Jimmie's wife, about him and their first meeting, "I was expecting, of course, to see a man about six feet tall, and weighing about two hundred, a good, healthy, wide-awake man, but what was my surprise to see a little bit of a slender fellow, that never could have been more than five feet four, and, above all things, a cripple, wheeling himself around in a chair!"

Her description of him is so lifelike, so alive, that it will serve as the best introduction, and besides, she alone, until she told Katie, knew the whole history of his life, for he early recognized in her the confidante he had so long needed.

"Do you know, Katie," she said, "that man is the most wonderful one I ever saw? He gets more things done, and better done, than any one I ever knew. Don't begin to compare him with me, now. I know you always think that of me, and tell me so often that I'm ashamed to hear it, but when you consider what he does, and how he does it, it's wonderful. He never goe at a thing in the least roundabout way. If h wants a thing, or wants to do a thing, he go right after it. Now, for instance, when he f got well — But I must go back to the b

ning and tell you the whole story of his life. He told me in confidence, so it's not to go any farther, but he said he had told parts of his life history to so many people that had come to him in difficulties, and so many of the young folks especially had heard bits of it, and it seemed to do them good, that he didn't mind telling it much. I'm not telling you because you need it to do you good, but because you'll know better what sort of man he is.

"And, Katie, I do wish if you notice that I'm dropping my 'g's' and saying 'ain't got' and 'have went,' and that sort of thing, you'd let me know. Now Frankie's coming home from school I don't want he should be ashamed to hear me speak. And I do know better, if I haven't ever 'swallowed a grammar nor yet et a spelling-book,' as my mother used to say. You will, won't you? Well, then, I'll go back to Mark.

"When he was eighteen he was teaching school in the country one winter, and they had Baptist protracted meeting at a church right next to the schoolhouse. He was strong for his size then, and as well as any boy. The people where he boarded used to go to church every night, and as he didn't have much to read, and enjoyed going, he used to go with them. The man that was holding services there was one of these great, big men,

that just make you see things as they do, and, fortunately for Mark, this one saw things just about straight. Well, before that man left the neighbourhood, Mark had made up his mind to be a preacher. He had joined the church when he was just a boy, twelve or thirteen, he said, but his own church had never gotten hold of him as this man did. But since he was already in a church he made up his mind to stick to the one he was in and do the work that was waiting for him.

"By the time he was twenty-one, he had enough money saved to start to school, with what help he would get from the church, and with what he could earn as he went along. He had made up his mind to take as many years' school as he could afford to, then stop and work, and keep on studying till he saved more, then go back and finish.

"He had fully made up his mind to be independent, but it was difficult to refuse the offer that old Captain Hawkins made him. Captain Hawkins was a trustee of the church, the Methodist church it was that Mark belonged to, and it was kind o' decided that when Mark got settled down and had finished school, and was a full-fledged preacher, that the captain's Polly was going to try her han at being preacher's wife, and running the sewi society and the woman's prayer-meeting. M

said the neighbours had settled the affair before he and Polly did, but, anyway, it was all fixed, and the captain just insisted that he should loan Mark the money to go through on. Mark told the captain that he hadn't seemed so very anxious to get rid of his daughter when they first spoke of being married, and now it certainly looked as if he was trying to put it off still longer. Mark said he wasn't going to marry the captain's daughter until he was free to do so, and he was going to be in debt to her father least of all.

"In September he started out for the theological seminary where he was to study. And in December they brought him home in a wheel-chair, a gray-haired man of forty, to all appearances. He didn't have much to say about that, but I heard from others. He told me once he wouldn't tell me because he still felt so bitter toward those who were responsible for his condition. All that the others knew was that the first week he was in school the upper class boys got him out one night, and what they put him through Mark never told, but he went to his room the next morning, went to bed, and from there to the hospital, and when he came out of that, it was only to come home in a wheel-chair, and he's had to travel in that ever since.

"All that he left out, but he began where he

reached town where he lives now. His folks, an old aunt and uncle, without anything to live on but their garden, and what the old man could earn at odd jobs, took him in, of course, but he couldn't be a burden on them. His hospital bill had taken all he had saved for his schooling, and so he came home without a cent, and in debt for his chair.

"'I was pretty near hopeless then,' he told me, 'but I remembered that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and I made up my mind to show Him that I did truly love Him by trying hard to forgive those "that despitefully used me," and by going on with my work for Him here. It was mighty hard work for me to forgive them when I thought of Polly, and of the happiness we had hoped for, but I made up my mind that their punishment was not in my hands, but in those of a higher power, and it wasn't so terribly hard.

"'But when Polly came home — she had been on a visit and failed to get the letter I had sen' her when I was convalescing in the hospital, letter telling her the whole story, and releasir her from all promises for the future. As soon she got home she came to see me. Her mother h

not dared to tell her anything but that I was sick, and they came together.

"'It was in March, I remember, the first day warm enough for me to get out on the porch. I had been hard at work, for I began studying book-keeping as soon as the doctors would let me use my head at all, and I had the books of one grocery store to settle up and straighten out every day, so I was not entirely a burden on my uncle and aunt. I had wheeled my chair out on the porch at the side of the house, and was sitting there just breathing deep, and thinking of the big things I would yet do, when I heard a step on the porch, and Polly turned the corner. Her mother had gone indoors, but Polly, when she heard I was outside, had turned the corner and was coming toward me.

"'It was a glimpse of the heaven that I had almost begun to doubt, but with the after-sting of the hell that I no longer doubted, to see her coming toward me, so young and fair, and so alive. She came to me where I sat and dropped to her knees beside my chair, and, putting up her arms, pulled my head down to her shoulder. "Mark," she whispered, "I love you." I had made up my mind from the moment I first knew I should never walk again, and yet, when she, in all her beauty, for she was, to me, the most beautiful woman I ever

saw, knelt there beside me, it was hard, so hard, but it had to be done.

"'"Polly," I said, "do you know that I will never be able to take a step again?" Her only answer was, "I love you." Then I crushed the love that swelled in my heart, and I scattered my longings to the winds.

"'"Polly, I love you, but I can never let you care for me as we had planned and hoped. The doctors tell me I shall never be able to walk again. You are free." And I removed her arms from around my neck and pushed her away to arms' length. "You are young," I went on, "and beautiful, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. You must be free. I have no right to keep you bound to me, a poor man, helpless, hopeless." Then I wheeled my chair to the end of the broad porch and back, while she knelt where I had left her.

"'"There! See what a proud thing for you to call husband. Polly, it is best for both of us that you should forget me. I ask you to. Wil you not do that, the only thing I can let you do fc me?" Then I went on, for I could not sit th helpless, and see the pain and sorrow in her as she looked at me wheeling backwards and wards in circles across the wide porch. I that I was bruising her heart, but I had to

I couldn't give in, and yet the thought of giving her up was gall to me.

"'"Haven't you too much pride, Polly, to let you even think of such as I for a companion? Wouldn't it be a pretty sight for you and me to go down the street together? You, a gloriously live woman, and I, a mere shell of what was once a man. Think what it would be for you to be tied to such as I. To see me, thin, haggard, old, gray, a mere shadow of what was once a living being. To sit opposite to me at the breakfast-table, to which I have to be wheeled like a child. But, first of all, think what it would mean to have your cousins, young, healthy, happy, like you, all your friends, who have never known me, think how you would like to have them see us together, and to know that I, more even than yourself, was suffering from what they need not say, it would read so plainly in their glances. Think of that, and of giving up your life to caring for me, waiting on me, sacrificing everything for me. No! Don't think of it! You must not think of it! You are free! You are free!" And I knew I had been successful when she rose slowly, and with her head turned away held out her hand. "Good-bye, Mark," was all she said.

"'When my uncle came out to help me into the

house when they were gone, he found me fallen forward against the strap, which, bound across my chest, secured me in the chair. They were understanding people, and no matter what they may have thought, not one word did they ever say against Polly.

"'As soon as spring came and I could get down to the business part of town, I did so, and soon found sufficient work on the books of small merchants and grocers. But I knew my uncle and aunt were soon going to be dependent upon my efforts, so I must secure some more certain means of livelihood than the odd work I had been able to pick up.

"'In May it occurred to me that this was the year for election of county officers, and I set my mind on securing one of these. To be sure I was but twenty-one, had never even voted, but my father had been a confirmed Democrat, and I thought by that means I might pick up a few votes although I was intending to offer myself as candidate on the Republican ticket, for the oppos tion stood no show whatever of victory in t county, and I was quite without political bias.

"'As soon as I came to this decision I we old Judge Willoughby, who held the Repul party in the county in the hollow of his ha

got some one to wheel me into his office in the old county office building one day while he was at lunch, so as to be ready for him when he returned. He knew me, of course, but I don't believe he had ever spoken to me a dozen times in my life. But the old judge had a nephew who was in his second year at the same seminary where I had gone, and while I don't know whether or not the old judge suspected his nephew of being one of my tormentors, he may have thought that I was certain that the nephew was.

"'At any rate, when the judge got in from lunch, I was ready for him, and when he did get a chance to say a few words, about all there was left to say was that I might have any office in the county if I'd only stop talking, and, the old judge put it rather slyly, if I could beat out any of the present office-holders in the convention.

"'Since I had been so bold, I put on my boldest face, and said, "And what office, judge, would you recommend that I go after? You know who's weakest." He seemed to like my nerve, for he laughed, and said, "If you go after the voters and talk like that, it doesn't make much difference which one. You'd probably get them all." But he finally advised me to try for the office of register of deeds of the county. That wasn't so important,

but the salary and fees were fairly good, and there was considerable dissatisfaction with the present holder.

"'As soon as that was settled, I started my campaign. Next Saturday's *Banner* had an announcement of my candidacy, and from then in May, till election, I was busy. I bought a horse and buggy on my face, and borrowed a boy to drive for me. I started out every morning, rain or shine, after finishing up my bookkeeping, for I had to stick to that to live, and I visited every voter on the road I'd take. I'd strike them at their ploughs, or hauling manure, and I'd follow them down into the fields, and talk crops and politics, and every time I'd get right down to business, and ask the one question, "Will you vote for me if I can get the nomination?"

"'The other papers in the county took up the matter, and then some blunders worse than ever came out in the register's office, and by and by, when the conventions came, I got the nomination on the Republican ticket.

"'I guess old Judge Willoughby must have dor something on the side, too, for when the Dem cratic convention came, what was my surprise get the nomination there. The Democratic lea said right out, "Since the Republicans have

us the honour to name one of our best and strongest young Democrats for the office of register of deeds, it is thought inadvisable for the Democratic party, as here represented, to do other than concur in the nomination, and by leaving the place vacant on our ticket, to permit the election of one satisfactory to both parties."

"'Well, as the old folks used to say, "Them that has, gets," so, having gotten started, I found myself getting right along. First, there was the county office, with its salary and fees, and then I kept up the bookkeeping work, and first thing I knew I had a lot of work for the old judge, and finally, after two terms in office, a new bank was started and I was offered the cashiership of that.

"'So I've gotten along all right, but, after all, and through all, whether I'm sitting up there in the choir-loft leading the choir, or counting cash in the bank, or getting out and speaking at a political meeting, for both sides claim me yet, and I've spoken for both in half a dozen campaigns, the remembrance of that morning when I gave Polly up and made Polly give me up still gets between me and what I have to do. When her mother died, a year or so after I was hurt, Polly and her father moved away from the little farm just out of town where they lived, and I never saw either of them again, but

I hear of her once in a while, a word or two from some one who visits at her town, how she lives quietly, doing good here and there in a quiet way, and always wearing black as if in mourning. She never married, so it must be for her father and mother. She thought so much of them.' "

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. PARKER

FROM the church Mrs. Parker went directly home, where she found her daughter and Thomas, as she called her husband (though every one else called him "Tommy," even to the little children on the streets, just as they called Mark Williams by his first name), wildly excited over the unknown contents of the telegram, and hazarding the wildest guesses as to its contents. She burst in upon them as they sat with the four younger children at dinner, and effectually dispelled with her first remark the cheery feeling which prevailed in the house during her absence.

"Well, Thomas, you must think the store will run itself, sitting here till one o'clock. And what are you children doing here? Why aren't you off to school?"

The children disappeared immediately, and poor, fat little Tommy and Mary were left to bear the burden of Mrs. Parker's remarks.

"I suppose you're waiting to hear what that telegram was about. Well, it isn't anything so much. That scamp of a Ben is coming home tonight. I didn't read it scarcely, but — Well, let's see. 'Will be home tonight from Klondike. Made pretty good haul.' What's the Klondike, and what's he mean?"

"Why, ma, that's that gold place in Alaska. Sime Sawyer down to the store was telling about his cousin that had sold his farm and was going there in the spring — no, went there this spring, I think it was. Bought up all the hound dogs around —"

"Humph! So he's made some money, has he? Well, I won't deny I'm beat. I always said he wouldn't come to any good end. Of course, the end hasn't come yet, but — well, I hope he come by it honestly. You can't expect much, I must say, of a boy that runs away from a good home, and goes off gallivanting around nobody knows where, and I don't know as anybody cares much. Well, so he's got some money at last. There's the Rogers side of him coming out now. Nobody ever knew a Parker to make any money or make a success o' anything.

"Now, Mary, don't set there any longer. If y' brother is coming home, we'll want to fix up thi

a little for him. His old room the little boys has now, but the spare room I guess will do. Maybe he won't stay long, and then maybe he'll want to stay right along. And, say, pa, you'd better stop in to the butcher's and have some nice steak sent up for breakfast. Get the best. We don't want him to think we live on skimpings. And if you see Jackson you might ask him about that addition we was talking about having put on the house last year. We may need it if he stays long. Now, Thomas, don't you breathe a word of this to anybody. I expect the young ones will run to school and tell everybody that we've got a telegram, but they needn't know what it's about. And when the night train comes, Thomas, you go down to the station and meet Ben and come right up to the supper with him. Folks might as well know how well he's looking and doing, and take a hack, you'd better. Ben can pay for it, and it will look real swell."

As soon as poor, pudgy little Tommy was out of the door, Mrs. Parker turned to Mary. "And, Mary, don't you say anything to him about your being engaged to Frank Brown. Yes, I know we was going to let it out next week, but maybe — well, we won't say anything about it yet. That snooping old Mrs. Bell, Jim's wife, tried to find out from

me this morning something about it, but I shut her up. She's so stuck up with her boy studyin' doctorin', and her two grandbabies, that's nothing but stepgrandbabies, that she thinks she can run things. Well, we'll see. And say, Mary, if Frank comes to-night I'll take him in charge. Now, you remember. Don't you say a word about it to Ben, and don't see Frank any more than you can help."

"Why, mother?" Mary turned to say, but her mother was all ready with her reply.

"You know I never did approve of Frank. He's not a church-member, and I heard him say that when he sees some of the people that are church-members, he doesn't want to be one. So maybe it's just as well that you shouldn't marry him. Now, don't say a word. Just run up-stairs and fix up the spare room, while I make some of those little cakes Ben used to like so well."

Two hours later, having finished baking, and leaving Mary in a fit of tears because of her remarks about Frank Brown's joining the church, she sailed down the street toward the public square. There were certain purchases that her new position as the mother of a prodigal returned from that fabulous Klondike necessitated. A new veil, at least, for her old one was rusty, and the girls ought to have new hair ribbons, and the little boys really

needed new caps before Sunday. Her purchases having been made, she turned her steps toward a new house that was going up on one of the side streets that led past the church where her fellow workers of the morning were still at intervals almost angrily discussing the strange and unsocial actions of the noon hour. She turned in at the gateway, and was pleased to hear by the cheery whistle that the man working within was alone. She had been intending for some time to have a talk with Frank Brown about the "state of his immortal soul," and this was certainly her opportunity.

The worker, who was busily hanging the wall-paper of a front room, certainly seemed surprised rather than pleased to see her, and excused himself for continuing his work, as he was obliged to finish in order to give way to the cleaning-women.

Mrs. Parker seated herself on a box in the centre of the room, and entered into her subject forthwith.

"Frank, we have been talking things over at home, and we've come to the conclusion, Mary and I, that you ought to join the church."

"No doubt I ought, ma'am," the worker cheerfully answered. For a minute he was busy trimming around a window and did not speak further until he had the strip of wall-paper finished. Then

he stepped over the low table made of a board across two boxes, and stood in front of the woman, who sat, slender, angular, vinegary enough, Frank said to himself, to sour all his paste.

"Mrs. Parker," he said, "if I join the church, and I'm not sure that I will do so, it will not be until after Mary and I are married. I will not have any one say that I joined the church to get a wife. If Mary cares for me, and I know she does, she will marry me in or out of the church. If she doesn't care for me — why, then I can stay here in this town. I am not anxious to move, but — "

"If that is your decision, Frank Brown, then you need not plan further for marrying Mary. She agreed with me that it was unwise to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever, and I must say, although I tried to persuade her, I believe she's right. Now Thomas joined the church before I married him — "

"Did he never regret it?"

"How could he? Although he never takes the church work very seriously, or anything else for that matter. But — as I was saying, if you have made up your mind, so, too, has Mary made up her mind, and she can no more think of marrying — "

"Who did you say had made up her mind?"

"Mary has, and so — well, I'm very sorry, for

like you, but since you are so persistent, there's only one thing to do. I'll tell Mary — "

" Thank you, Mrs. Parker, but I'll tell Mary myself. I'll probably see her at the supper to-night, and we'll settle that matter. I think I may be able to make her see things differently."

" No, I don't think you can. But I must go. I'll tell her of your decision. I don't think you'd better call. It'll only make it harder for her. Good-bye."

By this time Mrs. Parker was pretty well tired out, but she retraced her steps toward home, and found Mary busily engaged in wiping up the front steps when she reached the house.

Mrs. Parker went to the heart of her subject immediately.

" Mary, I happened to run on to Frank downtown — "

" Why, I thought he was working at Wyatt's new house. Is he done? Then he'll be up to-night."

" No, he isn't done, and he won't be up to-night, and if he is, you won't want to see him after what he said. I told him I heard he was going to join the church Sunday, and he said, 'Me? Well, I guess not. You don't get me into any church. And Mary knows it, too. She is going to marry me, church or no church, and there's an end to that nonsense.' Now, if you, a self-respecting girl,

..... it wouldn't
You wouldn't think of seeing him
that remark, would you?"

"But, mother, did he say that? Jus
times, you know, you've misunderstoo

"Well, I haven't misunderstood a
time. And he said he wasn't runni
girl by joining the church, and he said
you didn't marry him, he could stay h
What did he mean by that?"

"Why, you know he lives with his b
but he said when we were married,
away, because he could do better else
being, — well, not having relatives, — w
know just what he meant."

"Well, I know. He meant that if y
him he'd move away so's to get you away
folks. That's what. And you'd think o
a man like that? Here's Willie, now.
write Frank a note, and send it to him by
tell you what to sav."

the paper-hanger was working. A few minutes more, and, happy in the possession of a nickel, the first start toward his Fourth of July celebration, he was hurrying toward the church, where he knew he should find his mother, repeating his message to be sure he had it straight.

"Now, Willie, tell your mother, and you needn't wait till you get her alone, either, that, under the circumstances (remember that word, and make it existing circumstances, Willie), under the existing circumstances, Mr. Brown (that's me, Willie, but she'll know, you bet), that Mr. Brown does not care to carry on any correspondence (don't forget that word, Willie, existing circumstances, correspondence) with her in regard to her daughter's affairs. If (make it a big 'if,' Willie), if her daughter has any explanations to make, Mr. Brown will call and receive them in person."

Mrs. Parker had just seated herself in the only vacant place at the quilt side, and was already feeling the little coolnesses in return for her snub of the lunch-hour, when Willie came bursting in.

"Oh, ma, I took it and give it to him, and he sent it back, and here it is, and he give me a nickel, ma, so I will have firecrackers the Fourth, and, oh, yes, he told me to tell you, and not to wait till I got you alone, either, that under the circumstances,

no, existing circumstances, Mr. Brown, that's Frank, but he said he bet you'd know, did not care to carry on any correspondence, he said that over twice, with her, that's you, ma, and that if her daughter, that's Mary, had any explanations to make, he'd call in person to receive them. And, ma, he give me a nickel."

After one attempt to stem the torrent of words, for Willie took after his mother in his ability to speak rapidly, she gave up till he had finished. Then, under pretence of taking the note from him, she caught him skilfully by the ear, and, to the angry surprise and amazed disgust of Mrs. Jim and the others, she led the boy from the room. By the time the sounds of spanking had died away and she had returned to the room, the opinion of the women gathered there was almost unanimous in regard to some one's inability to bring up children. "And it was no wonder the boys ran away. And now the daughter, who really looked as if she'd have a chance to amount to something, was having her happiness spoiled by her mother's sticking her nose in."

This second thunderbolt was too much for the women, and Mrs. Parker felt very plainly the coolness which existed around the two quilts in the church parlours, and she soon hurried across the hallway to help set the tables and get the dishes

ready for the supper which was announced to begin at half-past five and last to seven. She alone of her family was to be there, until Tommy was to bring Ben to the church, for Mary had retired to bed with a sudden sick headache, and a cold lunch had been spread on the kitchen table for the four younger children. When Ben and Tommy came she would give up her apron to some one else, and she and her husband and "our son Ben" would sit down at the table with the preacher and the assistant superintendent of the Sunday school and Mark Williams, and the other notables who were always placed at one table. To the supply of this table she had contributed cole-slaw and baked beans, and she had tucked away a caramel cake behind some dishes in the cupboard in the kitchen, so that table, at least, would have enough cake.

After Mrs. Parker's departure from the quilting-room, Mrs. Jim listened in silence to the comments of the others. She never could make plans while she was talking, and she was thinking over what she had to tell Mark Williams. "He has such a good opinion of Maria Parker, and I guess he'll be surprised a little. And both in one day, too. I would like to know what was in that telegram. I'll bet Maria broke off Mary's and Frank's engagement just because of something in that."

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

THE next day Mrs. Jim went to the farm with her husband, and in the afternoon when Jim was off working with Jimmie, and the two babies were asleep, Jimmie's wife heard a full account of the doings of the day before.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Jim, after she had told the incidents of the day up to Willie's punishment, "I certainly did want to give Maria Parker a piece of my mind, but then I thought that now was the time of all when I didn't want her to get mad at me, for I wanted to do what I could for the good of her family, and I knew I couldn't do a thing if we didn't get along at least as well as usual. So I just shut up and didn't say anything to anybody, for I didn't want the others running to her with stories, as I knew they would. At least, the stories get around somehow, and somebody must tell them, so I didn't say a word till Mark Williams came. I thought he'd get there early. He usually does,

unless there's trouble striking a balance at the bank. Then sometimes he's kept there till ten o'clock at nights. But he usually manages to get around on time for socials, and it really don't seem like a social without him there.

"Finally, though, he did come, and I had plenty of time to talk to him, for I wasn't on the committee that gave the supper, so I didn't have to work unless I wanted to. You know the sewing society is divided into committees that give suppers once a month. Just those that belong to the committee contribute, so it don't come hard on everybody every time.

"As soon as it got a little dark inside, for the little church parlours were dingy and poorly lighted, I went out and sat down on the grass with the young folks that was waiting for the bell to ring to let folks know that supper was ready.

"Just as the bell rang, the big church bell, you know, Mark came wheeling up in his chair. The young folks all went in as soon as they heard the bell, but Mark wasn't in any hurry, so we sat out on the church steps and talked. I had a heap of things to tell him, and I wondered when he heard about Maria Parker and the telegram, and the breaking of Mary's engagement, and Willie's spanking, just how he'd stand up for her. I knew he would, for

I never heard Mark Williams say a bad word about any one, and the more anybody else runs people down, the more he tries to say good things about them. But he won't say them unless he thinks they're true.

"I started out and told him that whole day's story, and he did stand up for her, just as I knew he would. 'Now, Mrs. Bell,' he said to me when I was done, 'you can't blame her for wanting to keep that telegram to her own family, can you? I don't want to say anything against anybody, but you wouldn't want a telegram of yours read here at this sewing-circle, would you? Is there any way it would spread faster? Of course, you and I both know that it's only because all the folks are interested in all the others, but that doesn't make it any better. Now, perhaps it was a business telegram. Some private affairs she didn't want you to hear about. Do you blame her?'

"'Well, no,' I said, 'but what about not letting Tommy know what was in it, and what about his not being allowed to open his own telegrams?'

"'Are you sure it was Tommy's telegram? If you had seen the address do you think you could have told who it was directed to? Half the time telegrams are just directed to something or other Parker, you can't tell whether it's Mr. or Mrs

And then if it was a business telegram, Tommy would have told the children like as not, and half the town would have known about it. I think she did just right about reading the message here. As to spanking Willie, I don't think one will come in amiss. He's so full of the old Nick that he just runs over. I only hope he won't go the way Ben did.'

"Now, I had heard several times about Ben's running away, but never from Mark, and I wanted to hear how he'd excuse him. I knew he'd have some excuse for the boy, but I wanted to see how he'd defend both the boy and his mother, for I never thought of laying any blame to pudgy, little Tommy Parker for Ben's leaving home. So I asked him about Ben, and he told me just what I'd heard before, only he smoothed over both Ben's actions and his mother's, so that it didn't sound like it had the other times I'd heard it, when either Ben was a regular young devil, and his mother was an angel right from heaven, or Ben was a poor, long-suffering boy, as meek as Moses, and Maria had treated him worse than the story-book step-mother.

"'Well,' Mark started out, 'ten years ago Mrs. Parker was just as she is to-day, a little hard to people that don't understand her, but, after all,

doing everything, as she thinks, for the good of her family. In one way she worships her family. Everything she can do to add to the glory of her family she does. It is a common way with women who marry, as they think, into a family a little lower in the social scale than their own. They have to do all they can to make themselves believe that the man they married is, after all, "the one man" to them, and, of course, just by that action, they show every one else that they are a little ashamed of having married as they did. Now this breaking Mary's engagement she doubtless thinks is for the family good. Perhaps the telegram was a business one, and told them of some change in their fortunes. Change for the better, probably, for that sort of woman would never have given up as good a match as Frank Brown will be for her daughter, if there had been any falling off in their affairs.

"'But to go back to Ben. He had been a sort of happy-go-lucky youngster, like his father in looks, but like his mother in every other way. That is one reason they never got along well together. As soon as she saw how much like his father he was getting in looks that feeling of shame that she felt toward the father grew more bitter toward the son, and then his temper and hers used to clash. I think she thought she treated him well, but I know

he thought he was always abused. At that time they couldn't afford things as well as they can now, and Ben didn't have anywhere near as many good times as the other town boys had. He had to stick to the store work, and hardly ever had a holiday. He had been out of school for several years before this.

"'At last she did let him join the band here in town, and he played with them for nearly a year. Then came the trip to Hudson for the county fair, and she wouldn't let him go because she said he wouldn't come to any good traipsing off to county fairs with that rough crowd. He said he would go, and I can't blame him for that. A boy of eighteen certainly should have some privileges. She said if he did go he needn't ever come back. He told her he didn't want to come back. The next I heard was that he had gone to Hudson, and from there he'd gone to join a circus band travelling with a little wagon company through the State. She never even sent him any of his clothes that he wrote for and sent money to pay for. Tommy was all broken up for a while, but you know how he is, so jolly that he can stand anything and get over anything.

"'Now, I don't blame Mrs. Parker for Ben's leaving home. She did just exactly what she

thought was right, and it isn't for us to say whether or not she was right or wrong. That will all be settled by the One who knows. I won't try to defend Ben, for he wouldn't thank me for it. But I think if he doesn't get too deep into the mire there in the West wherever he is, that he'll come back home some day a pretty decent sort of man, for all the children think a heap of Tommy, and I don't know but what they do of their mother. And I always thought Ben had lots of good in him.'

"We had finished talking, and I was just going in to get one of the boys to come out and help run Mark's chair down the steps, when who should come running up but Tommy Parker? He hurried into the kitchen where Mrs. Parker was working. She was on the committee, I think I told you. They came outside, and I heard him say to her just as we were going through the church door, 'I telephoned down and he said the train would be an hour late, so I came right up, so's not to get left. I knew if I waited that everything would be gone. I'll go down and meet him as soon—' but just then the door slammed, and I didn't hear the rest.

"Mark and Jim and the preacher and I sat down at the table that was empty then, and pretty soon in came Tommy and sat down too. Maria came in with him, and when he asked her if she wouldn't

eat now, she said, 'No, I'll wait.' Tommy went on, 'Oh, ma, you'd better come on and eat. He—' but she shut him up with one look, and then she went out to see we was waited on.

"Mark and Tommy and the preacher and I was just having a good visit. The preacher didn't say much. He never does for fear he'll waste something that he thinks is good enough to use in his sermons, and the land knows some of them need the good things bad enough. Mark got to telling some of the queer things that happen in the bank, and of the mistakes that people are always making. People you'd think would know better, too. The preacher was just reaching across to pass something to Tommy when we heard some noise in the hall, and Tommy jumped so he spilled the slaw, it was, all over the cake dish. I grabbed a napkin and tried to wipe things up, so I didn't see all that was going on, but I saw most of it.

"Tommy started toward the door, and he got just about half-way to it when it opened, and in came the town hackman half-dragging, half-carrying a man. I looked at Mark and he whispered, 'Ben Parker,' and then I looked for Mrs. Parker. She came sailing out of the kitchen when somebody called her, and hurried up to where the hackman stood, still holding that poor, weak, draggled-

looking man. I almost made up my mind I could like her when she leaned over and kissed her son right before all those folks.

"The hackman began, 'He said to bring him up here if you was all here. And I remember you left word you'd want the hack, so I knew he was the one you was looking for. I have to go down now and meet that excursion that's an hour late, so if you'll pay me, I'll be going, or shall I take him up to the house?'

"Ben seemed to come to enough then to say the first words I'd heard him speak, 'Daddy, you'd better pay him, for I'm dead flat broke.' Then I knew I couldn't make up my mind to like Maria Parker, for the look that came over her face when she heard that gave her away completely, and she stammered out, 'Why, ain't you just from the Klondike? and didn't you make a good haul? You telegraphed you did.' Then I knew why she had welcomed Ben as she had, and I could see that Mark saw, too, and from the look in his eyes I knew he'd begun to lose faith in the woman. Tommy, poor man, went down in his pockets for the money for the hackman, while Maria went on, 'What did you telegraph for that you had made a good haul? Comin' home here spongin' on us! I'd be ashamed of myself if I was you.'

"Turning to Tommy, who was about to hand the hackman a quarter, she said, right out before all those folks, 'Now, see here, Thomas, don't you pay one cent to that man. And that scapegrace son of yours can just go back where he came from.' But Tommy handed the man the money, then turned to his wife and said, and I never respected any man more than I did him at that minute, 'Maria, this is our son. He's going to be taken to our house, and he's going to be taken care of. We drove him away from home ten years ago, but we're not going to turn him away from our door now that he's sick and helpless. As to whether he's got any money or not, that makes no difference. I'm glad to see him, and to help care for him if he is penniless, and I say he's to go to our house.'

"By this time Mark had wheeled up near the group at the door, and Ben, looking up so wearily it made me almost cry, caught Mark's eye. Then he roused up enough to say, 'No, daddy, I can't come home now. I did have some money when I started, but I got in with a crowd of fellows at Chicago, and I don't remember much about it, but they cleaned me out. I guess they must have put me on the train and sent that telegram, for I don't remember anything about it. No, daddy, I won't go home with you. I'll just go along with Mark,

here, if he don't mind, and I'll be able to pull out to-morrow or next day. Sorry to have troubled you, daddy,' and then his head dropped.

"Mark took charge then. To the hackman he said, 'Take him to my house, and tell the housekeeper to put him to bed. I'll be right up.' Then he turned to Mrs. Parker, who had dropped into a chair limp with surprise at Tommy's rebellion, 'Mrs. Parker, I fear the excitement will be too much for you. Hadn't you better go home?' To her husband he whispered, 'Tommy, it's a hard blow to your wife. Be good to her.' And if I hadn't been so interested and excited myself, I'd have laughed at the idea of having to ask Tommy to be good to his wife, who abused him and made his life perfectly miserable.

"I stopped at the bank and saw Mark this morning. He said that when Ben once got to bed he was delirious for a while, and the doctor feared typhoid. And he thought he must have made a pretty good haul from the sums he mentioned in his delirium.

"I don't know how it's going to come out, but I know I despise and abominate Maria Parker, and I respect Tommy, more than I ever expected to. I'll not let her know just what I think of her yet, for I want to keep in with her so I can get a chance

to make up to her children for what they don't get from her. I know now why Mary's engagement was broken, and I think I'm about the best one to get those two young folks on to the right track again. What do you think?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPLIT IN THE CHURCH

"Now, Jim, who's that driving up to our gate? I can't see for these vines around the window. I thought you were going to cut them out some. Oh, it's the Martins. Better get out and take their horse, Jim. Well, I never expected to have them come to see me."

Ten minutes later Mr. and Mrs. Martin were seated in big easy-chairs on the side porch, while Mrs. Jim sat on the top step and shelled peas, for, as she said, they had come just in time for dinner, and she didn't know when she picked the peas why she had picked so many, but she knew now. As soon as she could, she turned the conversation to the Martins' son, who was working his way through college, and was the pride of their lives.

"And how is Will? Frankie hears from him once in a while, but I don't hear from Frankie often enough to keep up hardly. He hates to

write letters as bad as I do, and I hate it worse than anything I have to do."

Mrs. Jim knew they had come to talk of something else than their son, but she made up her mind to keep them off that subject until dinner was nearly ready, and then they would be sure to stay, for she hadn't had any one to talk with for some time, and there were any number of things to discuss. So from Will, when that subject was exhausted, she turned the conversation to their farm, which kept them going for some time, or, rather, kept Mr. Martin, for Mrs. Martin rarely spoke much, and almost never when in the presence of two such talkers as her husband and Mrs. Jim.

At last, after the peas were on for dinner, Mrs. Martin said: "Now, see here, Mrs. Bell, we didn't come here to talk all 'round Robin Hood's barn, wherever that is, but we came to talk about church, and we're not goin' to let you switch us off on other things any more. Joel, tell Mrs. Bell what we've decided."

Mr. Martin began: "Mrs. Bell, we're gettin' pretty old, I know, to think of doin' anything reckless, but I tell you we've got where we won't stand any more things like we've been standin'. First there was 'Children's Day,' and now, this Parker talk right at a church social, and from one of our

own members, too. I must say, I never expected much from Maria Parker, a woman that would drive her own boy away from home, but I certainly didn't expect her to talk like that to him when he comes back, and right in the church, too.

"But I'll go back to the beginning. We've been members of this church, Hettie and me, twenty-eight years last February, and I've been one of the trustees for seventeen years. Now, here it comes that because we don't come to church for a while, when it's too stormy for any folks of our age to get out, they give up the church to some of these new-fangled doin's called 'Children's Days.' They didn't have any such doin's when we joined the church, I tell you.

"Then we went to church in the mornin's and heard a sermon that lasted for two solid hours, and then heard another in the afternoon, and sometimes a third one in the evenin', but now the preacher gets up and talks about fifteen minutes or maybe a whole half-hour about books and art and such, and then dismisses the congregation. But I notice he doesn't leave out the collection! Oh, no! They never used to take more than one collection to a two-hour sermon, but now they sometimes call for two with only about a fifteen-minute sermon between them.

"But that isn't what I started to tell you. Here about every fifth Sunday, or maybe oftener, they give up the church to some new-fangled doin's, Easter, and 'Children's Days,' and 'Harvest Homes,' and that sort of thing. I believe in havin' speakin', and all that, but I believe in keepin' it in the schools, and not lettin' the preacher have so easy a time. Do you know, I counted up how much the preacher has to preach now, with this new half-hour sermon business and all his holidays, and it's only about forty-eight hours, less than two days out of the three hundred and sixty-five. Now what's he paid for?

"And then the calls, pastoral calls! The preachers used to come and spend the day and bring their families, but now the preacher just runs in and sits down on the edge of his chair for about fifteen minutes, and then skips on to the next place, like a child playing 'Pussy wants a Corner.' Why, I remember one preacher we used to have, that would drop in in the afternoons and sit down, and his shoes always hurt his feet, so he'd borrow a pair of my slippers, and he'd sit 'round all afternoon, and he'd do that everywhere just the same. And I hain't noticed that the sermons is a bit better for their stayin' at home and readin' so much and studyin' like they do nowadays. Lots

less hell-fire, and not enough brimstone to keep the moths out of the church carpet and cushions.

"But I haven't got yet to what I started to talk about. That is, about our pew bein' took out of the church to make room for a show in the church, and such a show. I never saw such a performance even at the county fair, nor yet the Centennial. The idea of turning that Mary Jane Higgins loose into a church to get up a service, and then getting in a parrot and a saloon-keeper and I don't know what all. Well, that's what we came to talk about. Now, the preacher is to blame for that. He told her to go ahead and run things, and she did, and among them she ran us out of our pew, and I don't know but out of the church, for we're not sure that we're goin' to stay in the church if there are any such performances goin' to go on in it. But maybe if we get another preacher — what do you think of this preacher, anyway?"

Mrs. Bell began to tell them, but was interrupted by the steady flow of speech that outlasted and outspeeded her own.

"Hettie and I don't think much of him. And the parsonage is gettin' to be a sight. Now Hettie and I give one hundred dollars toward that parsonage fifteen years ago, so we're interested in it, and we don't want to see it gettin' all run down.

So if that preacher with his six children comes back here another year we'll leave the church, that's all. Now, Mark Williams is in favour of Mr. Simms, so we can't send him as lay delegate, can we? Well, to come right out, Mrs. Bell, what we want is for your Jim to go as lay delegate, and to put it to those folks up there that we don't want Mr. Simms back here, but we do want a man that can call, and preach more than little skimpin' fifteen-minute sermons. And do somethin' beside raisin' young ones. What do you think of it, anyway?"

Mrs. Jim was silent for a moment.

"Now, both of you listen. You've had your say. Now I'll tell you something. You folks remind me — Now don't you go breaking in, Mr. Martin, or I sha'n't tell you a word of what you remind me of, but if you'll keep still for just a few minutes, I'll tell you about an old cousin of mine, Cousin Miranda, Miranda Jarvis, she was. She was left a widow young with no children, and plenty of money for them times. Had three hundred a year, I guess, and her house and little farm. She didn't have no children to bring up, and didn't hanker after trying to bring up anybody else's, so she went in for church work. Kind of a Mary Jane Higgins, only with some sense to begin with. For years she gave up her time to church work,

and when this happened that I'm going to tell you, she was about sixty-five, and still living all alone except for a little boy that came to do the chores morning and night.

"She had always had the preachers stay at her house after she got old enough so folks wouldn't talk, and the presiding elders always stayed there when they came for quarterly meetings. The regular church parsonage wasn't big enough to more than hold the preachers' families, and not always even that. Now, Miranda was a snifter at housekeeping, and always had her house as slick as a tin whistle. But this spring she had been having rheumatiz, and hadn't got her spring cleaning done at all. All the same, the presiding elder was coming, and so she sent word to him that he was expected to stay at her house. The preacher was always glad to have her invite him, for presiding elders are always big eaters, and the preacher had all he could do getting enough for his family of ten to eat.

"Miranda thought the last minute she'd get the house a little cleaned up, but she was so stiff with the ache in her joints, that she had all she could do with cooking for him, so she didn't get cleaned up at all, hardly. I was over there the day before. I was just a little girl, so I don't remember much about it, but I never saw a house look much cleaner

than that did. But Miranda was worrying because she didn't have the windows cleaned, and her closets were a sight, she said. Just as if the presiding elder was going snooping into the closets. He was a new one, a great, big, tall man, black and scowling, and he looked as if he could see through the side of a house. Miranda was worried when he came, but he was such a bright talker she forgot all about her 'dirty house,' as she called it.

"The next morning they drove down to church together, and she said when she went in she felt that something was going to happen, felt just as she did the morning before the church stovepipe fell down and spilled soot all over her new poplin gown, and wet soot, at that, and the poplin dove-colour. She couldn't think what there was that could happen, for she didn't sit near the stovepipes, now, but she was sure of something. And she wasn't disappointed, either, for the preacher got up and prayed, and then the presiding elder stood up, and she knew when he announced his text, 'First Corinthians, thirteen, twelve,' that the expected had happened. She didn't remember just the wording of that verse, but she sat as stiff as a poker till he began to read it, 'For now we see through a glass, darkly,' and she didn't hear any more, for all she could think of was that he had

noticed her windows, and he had dared to accept her hospitality, and then go to church and preach against her housekeeping.

"From the time she heard the text she didn't hear another word he said, for she kept getting madder and madder, and more worked up than she had been for years. She hadn't been well all spring, and now to have the presiding elder, and a young one at that, come out in open meeting, and preach against her housekeeping, was too much.

"At last she got so mad she just couldn't keep still a minute longer, and she rose right up and left the church. Two or three of the neighbours started to go out with her, but she wouldn't let anybody, and she unhitched her horse and drove off home alone, so mad she could hardly see straight.

"And when she got home she went to bed, and it was about two months before she got up again. Then she sent for the preacher and withdrew from the church. Nobody knew why she did as she did, till just before she died she told mother all about it, and she said, 'Sanna, if you want to cut off your own nose to spite your face, the best way I know of is to withdraw from the church where you've worked all your life. Your friends feel just about the same toward you, but you can't ever feel just the same toward them. You feel that they're looking

down on you all the time, and you feel sure that they're telling behind your back that you're not a Christian. I've tried it and I know.'

"Now, Mr. and Mrs. Martin, I don't know whether you'll get mad or not, but I'll tell you frankly that if you leave church for the reasons you gave, I'll think you're like Cousin Miranda. Just think what it would mean to you to give up your pew after holding it twenty-eight years, and not to go to any church, for you know you're too old to feel like starting in in any other church. How would you feel starting all over again as a Baptist, Mrs. Martin?"

Final preparations for dinner called Mrs. Jim away then, but when she returned she overheard Mrs. Martin saying, "Joel, I guess we can overlook that Children's Day affair, can't we? Maybe we are seeing through a glass darkly, ourselves."

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET LEE

A DAY or two after the visit of the Martins, Mrs. Bell had another morning caller. To her great surprise, when she opened the door, there stood before her a woman whom she had not seen since early in the spring.

"Why, Margaret Lee, where did you come from? I thought you were in Chicago."

"I got back last night, and as soon as I could this morning I ran over to hear all the news. Mother hasn't been out enough this spring to keep track of anything. She said she hadn't seen a soul for two weeks before I got home, for her rheumatism is worse than ever this year.

"No, I wasn't in Chicago but a week. You know I stopped at New Berlin on my way there, and almost as soon as I got to Chicago, they wrote to me from there to come back and finish out a term in the high school, for one of the teachers had left. I came right back, and have been there ever

since. But mother's knees and the fact that school is out there brings me home. She doesn't particularly need me, but she wants me around. Mary is so busy with her music that she never hears anything, and forgets it before she gets home if she does hear.

"Now, I've come early, and I want you to tell me everything that's happened since I left. Who's married, who are dead, and everything. The sort of things that folks don't write, or that they only write about so much of, 'They say Jennie Smith is to be married next month.' Then they don't tell to whom, nor say afterward whether she was or not. It's like people writing about sickness. Mary wrote, 'Mother has more trouble with her knee,' and then for three letters she never mentioned it again. I was worried almost enough to come home, but at last, after I had written a postal every day for a week asking how she was, I got three letters in one day saying that it really wasn't as bad as it might have been, and so on, but not telling me anything exact. I was so mad I sat right down and wrote them a scorcher of a letter. But they'll be just as bad next time. But now, I won't say another word this morning, for I want to hear all there has been doing. And I know you can tell me. How are Jimmie and the baby?"

Mrs. Jim had not fully recovered from her surprise until Margaret was well under way, and after that she realized the uselessness of trying to say anything until her caller had quite finished. Forty years of experience in getting ahead of others in conversation had shown her the impossibility of getting a word in edgewise in the speech of a woman who talked as rapidly as Margaret Lee, but she knew that when once she herself was really started that Margaret would be obliged to listen until she had quite finished, and she bided her time.

The moment that her caller finished, Mrs. Jim started on the spring's gossip, and she gave a brisk recital of the church and town happenings of the whole season, saving the return of Ben Parker as the most dramatic until the last. Finally she began on the story of Mrs. Parker's odd actions and the break with Frank Brown. She noticed how closely Margaret followed the story, but thought nothing of it until she came to the appearance of Ben Parker in the church doorway. Then she was surprised at the expression on Margaret's face, and at her questions.

"Ben home? Ben Parker? When did he come? Is he well? How does he look?"

Mrs. Jim finished her story before she tried to solve the meaning of her caller's questions, then

said, as she related the last of the happenings of that evening, "Why, Margaret, do you remember him? He went away ten years ago."

"Remember him? Remember Ben Parker? Why, Mrs. Bell, I — no, I won't say that. But I'll tell you just how much cause I have to remember Ben Parker and then you'll understand. I know every one else confides in you, so I know it's safe. No one else knows this but Mark Williams, and he guessed half of it before I told him a word. I had to tell some one, though, and now I feel that I must tell you.

"I'll begin way back when I was a youngster. You know when we first moved here, I was only four years old. We came from New Berlin, and papa went into business here with Ben Parker's uncle. They ran a store together for a good many years. Then Mr. Parker died, and Tommy, who used to clerk for him and papa, bought into the store. Papa was getting old and he couldn't stand 'that Maria Parker,' as he always called her, so he sold out to Tommy as soon as he could. That was the way we first got acquainted, Ben and I, for we used to be down at the store after candy and things, when he was about eight and I was six. Then when we got older we were in school together. He was as bright as a dollar, but we kept right

along together in our classes. I was afraid of him, and yet I was always proud of his attention to me. Even in school, when I was just in short skirts and pigtails, he called me 'his girl,' and said he was going to marry me just as soon as he had as much money as I did. I used to laugh at him when I was eight and he was ten, and say that I didn't see that it made any difference which one of us had the money, and that he did have as much as I had. Wasn't the firm name 'Lee and Parker,' and didn't his father own half, the same as mine did? 'Yes,' he'd admit, 'but that isn't what I mean. Where did my father get his money to buy in with your father with? Why, from mother. And don't we all at home know it, too? Doesn't she throw that up to him all the time? Poor old daddy! No, I won't marry you, Margaret, until I have as much money as you have, but I'm going to marry you all the same.'

"For years he used to talk that way, and I got quite into the habit of thinking that I was going to marry him, as girls of that age will. I was proud of him, for he was quick and stronger than the other boys, and he had such jolly ways about parties, and picnics, and such, that they never were the same without him. We went together right along through school till he dropped out to work,

but then we still saw each other at parties, and though he didn't say as much about going to marry me, once in a while he'd tell me, so I almost had to believe him, that he was going to marry me some day.

"As we grew older and he kept this up, I began to grow afraid of him, he was so big and strong, and said that same thing over so often and so confidently. I remember just how he used to look when he was saying, 'Margie, when I get as much money as you have, I am going to marry you.' There was one time in particular that I remember, one Fourth of July. A crowd of us, about a dozen, were sitting on the steps of the court-house watching the fireworks, and something I had said Ben didn't like. He called me to one side and said, 'Margie, I wish you hadn't said that.' I was inclined to be offish, and said, 'Well, Ben, I don't see that it concerns you in the least what I say, or how I say it.' I was fourteen then, I think, and I had a good opinion of myself, better than I have ever had since, almost. I sha'n't forget how serious he was when he said, and I saw how his face was set as the flash from a rocket lighted up his eyes, 'Margie, it does concern me, for when I have as much money as you have I am going to marry you.' I was feeling mad at the time, so I said, 'Well, if

you haven't as much money as I have now, you never will have,' and I pulled out the last of my Fourth of July money, three cents, from my pocket. He dropped his seriousness as the crowd gathered around us, and, accepting the challenge, went through his pockets only to find a solitary cent. I knew well where the remainder of his money had gone, for I had been feasted and lemonaded, and furnished with torpedoes to my heart's content. He laughed at his own condition, and said privately to me, 'See? You have the advantage of me now as always. We'll wait till I have as much as you have.'

"Then for a year or so I didn't have very much to do with Ben, or see much of him. He was busy with his work, and I was rather inclined to object to his so taking for granted my caring for him. I wanted to be won, not to have him feel that he had only to say the word when he was ready, and I, too, would be ready. Finally I went away to New Berlin to be with my aunt, and I didn't see anything more of him until after I'd heard that he'd left home. I didn't blame him much for leaving. I knew what his temper was, and what his mother's was, and I knew, too, how closely he was tied down, and how little chance he had had for an education. Of course we wrote to

each other when first I left here, but I grew tired of hearing in each letter, 'I'm going to marry you when I have as much money as you have.'

"Before he left home we had stopped corresponding, and I hadn't even heard of him for several years until one morning I was startled to hear a voice at the door which my aunt had opened in response to a knock. I heard only the voice, and did not hear just what was said, but I knew from the moment that I heard that voice, that it was really Ben who was going to marry me. I had never realized till then just how much I cared for him, but I did know then. A moment later my aunt came in and said, 'There's a young gentleman outside who wishes to see you. He didn't give any name, but said to tell you it was the man who was going to marry you.' The amusement on my aunt's face, and my surprise at Ben's confidence, angered me, and I turned back to the work I was at. 'Kindly tell him, the gentleman outside, that Miss Lee does not know any such gentleman. He must have made a mistake in his identity.' I was growing more and more angry as I thought of his absurd way of asking for me, and before my aunt returned I had vanished to my own room. There I broke down completely. How glad I had been at the sound of that voice, how I had admitted to

myself that he was right in what he said, and then how he had spoiled my delicious moment, my whole life, perhaps, by his foolish persistency. When my aunt toiled up the stairs to deliver his message, it was only through closed doors that I heard her. I could not bear for her to see me, with tearstained face, and eyes red with sudden tears, nor did I want her to suspect that I had hurried up-stairs to obtain the only opportunity of seeing, without being seen, the man I had turned away.

"How I strained my eyes for a glimpse of him as he passed down the street toward the town from the gate, but, alas! he turned up the street, and I didn't see him. When my aunt came to the door with the message from him, I was glad I hadn't seen him, and as I heard the message, 'Please tell Miss Margie that I *am* going to marry her when I have as much money as she has,' I could just imagine him going back to that circus crowd, for I remembered then that a circus was in town that day, and telling his friends there about going up to call on the girl he was going to marry when he had money enough. And I could hear my name buzzing around among the circus people and from them to the gossips of the town, and I tried to put his face and the memory of him out of my mind, and for the time I did, for I went down to lunch with

composed face and as calm an air as if I had never heard whispered through a keyhole any surprising message from a circus roustabout, for so I classed him.

"My aunt suggested having the audacious young man arrested, but I pleaded the notoriety that would give us, and she finally dropped the matter for the time. But every once in a while, as long as I stayed there, she would ask me in that most annoying way that near relatives often have, 'When are you going to be married? Or hasn't that circus man got enough money yet?' I stayed with her two years longer, and then came home, but although I tried to forget Ben Parker, yet the remembrance of how my heart leaped with joy at the sound of his voice, of that moment when I knew that he was right, that he was the man that I was going to marry if I ever married, came back to me with renewed force, and I could neither forget nor blame him for that confidence he had expressed. I was proud of him for being so confident, and I even excused his expressing himself as he had to my aunt. Of course he thought she knew about him. For certainly I must have told my people of the knight that was working for wealth and honour to lay at my feet. And then I thought of how he must have felt, and I was more proud than ever of him for his answer to my mes-

sage to him, and oh, how sorry that I hadn't seen him.

"When I got home I tried to hear from him, but the Parkers never speak of him, and no one else hears from him. Once Mark Williams said something to me that made me think he had guessed or heard something of what I hid from the others, and I told him. He seems so like a big brother to whom one can tell anything, and he soothes you and makes you so feel that it will surely come out all right, no matter what may happen. Then father died, and we two girls shared with mother what property he left, and I've often thought of that ten thousand, and wondered if Ben ever could get that amount together and would come back, or if he had given up years ago. And now you say he came back without a cent?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bell, "he borrowed from his father to pay the hackman. He's lost it all, no one knows how much, since he started home. But, Margaret, if I were you, I wouldn't let him lose the greater prize, the prize of knowing that you really care for him. If he does go back to try again, think what that will mean to him. I'd go to see Mark Williams if I were you."

"Mrs. Bell, if Ben Parker hasn't a penny to his name, and still cares for me as he did care in the

old days, I would go with him to the end of the world. But what can I do? He is as proud as I was, he is as stubborn as his mother. Can I go to him and say, 'Ben, won't you change your mind and marry me? I know I have ten thousand dollars, but won't you swallow your pride, and marry me?' I can't do that, can I?"

"No, you can't, but go and see Mark Williams, and if things don't straighten themselves out I miss my guess. Don't tell Mark Williams anything. Just let him tell you a few things. Haven't you some more money to invest? Can't he look after something for you? You will give him the chance to make Ben happy, won't you?"

"Do you think a woman could do that? Wouldn't people talk?"

"Margaret Lee, are you twenty-six years old, and don't know yet that people will talk without anything to talk about? Then why worry about giving them anything to talk about? What does it matter if they do talk, if you are happy and Ben is happy? Will you go to Mark Williams?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bell, I will, and what's more, I'll go now," and with the words, she started.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMENCEMENT

"YES, they're getting so highfaluting now in town that they think they have to follow everything that's done anywhere's else. Now, this year they even stopped school one day earlier so as to have high school commencement on Thursday just because the university has its commencement on that day. If somebody would start the fad of having a thing like that at midnight, there'd be folks to follow it, I don't doubt. Yes, yesterday was commencement, and as I don't suppose you ever have been to one and won't till Bessy is big enough to get through school, I might as well tell you about it.

"We have what's considered a right good school in town, takes four years to get through the high school, and we have about ninety scholars, and the teachers is pretty sensible, and so the youngsters get quite a lot out of their work. Of course, it's pretty hard to fix up courses so as to hit all alike.

Now, Johnny Peterson doesn't want to study anything but machinery, and Susy Smith wants nothing but elocution, and Lem Roberts's boy wants to study Latin, but Pete Brown's girl doesn't want that; she wants French, so if Cousin Minerva should ask her to go to Europe with her, she'll be all ready, not that Cousin Minerva ever asked anybody to go anywhere with her, nor ever went to Europe herself, but, anyway, it's so nice to be able to speak French. Frankie always said he thought that whole family ought to learn to speak English first, for if they didn't murder that language nobody did. Well, they all want different things, and most of them don't know what they want, but take just whatever their folks tells them to, and takes it hard, too. And so they arrange courses of studies for the youngsters, the classical course, and the scientific, and the English, and they teach them Latin or German, and a little botany, or just a little Chaucer, and how to read Milton, and what did Wordsworth mean by 'We are seven.' Well, after the youngsters have taken a course four years, or, if they're unusually stupid, for five years, they're ready to graduate, and then comes commencement. That is, most of them get through, only usually some few get through along in the winter sometime, instead of waiting for spring. They're the ones that

drops pepper down the register holes, or rolls marbles the length of the big room, or does some other of those fool tricks.

"Just about this time every year comes commencement, and thirteen or fourteen or so of the young folks get new dresses and new suits, and stand up and speak their little pieces, and it's all over, and they have to get out and hustle for the almighty dollar, unless their folks has already done a lot of hustling, and usually them that has, and has money, has to hustle a lot harder to keep what they have than they do to get it. But I'll begin at the beginning and tell you all about yesterday.

"I began to hear about it two or three weeks ago, when Tilda Ward came to me and wanted to know if they could get some of our pinies to decorate the hall with. Their class colours was silver and blue, and they wanted lots of white flowers. Oh, yes, each class has colours, and maybe a class pin and always a motto, like 'Rowing, not drifting,' or what is that Latin one, that is always a favourite? I can't think of it, but it's something about through difficulties to the stars, or something, though what they want to get to the stars for, I don't see. I told her she could have all she wanted if they was out in time, and I see her go past our place every day since then, I guess, to see how they

was coming, and after they come, to see how they was lasting.

"Then I heard more about it last week when the *Banner* come out with the notice that the baccalaureate address would be given to the graduating class at the Unitarian church on Sunday. I don't know what baccalaureate means, but it's something they borrowed from these college commencements. I didn't go, for I can't bear to listen to the Unitarian preacher.

"Wednesday I heard more of it when some of the high school boys that live neighbour to us came around to see if Jim wouldn't go with them with the horses to get evergreens to decorate the hall with. Of course he went. And he came home telling about how fine the town hall did look with its bright bunting, he called it, but when I see it next day it was silesia. Men never seem to know the difference between things unless they're dry-goods clerks, and it never seems as if they are more than half men, anyway.

"On Thursday morning Tilda Ward and two or three others came over to get the pinies. We had lots of them, big white ones. I don't like them a bit myself. I want a smelly flower, and not those big, stiff, cabbage-looking things. But they was

there when we bought the place, so we left them, and they're growing fine.

"The exercises was to be in the afternoon at two o'clock, so Jim and I had dinner early and started. We wanted to stop at Mark Williams's and ask how Ben Parker was getting along. Yes, he's been there, sick as can be, ever since that night at the church. Taken with typhoid, and was flat on his back next day. Had gone just as long as he could before he came down, 'walking typhoid,' the doctor said. Mark Williams was taking care of him, and they had a trained nurse to be up with him nights, for, of course, Mark couldn't do much what with his wheel-chair but just stay with him days and give him his medicine.

"We only stepped up on the porch and Mark wheeled out to talk to us. He said Ben was pretty bad, but they hoped for the crisis in a day or two. It was hard to tell just when it would come with him, being so long after he was taken with it before he came down. Mark was looking pretty bad himself, although he got out every day for a run down to the bank to see how things were. Of course it was a light time on business or he couldn't have been spared. He said Tommy Parker had been up every day to ask how Ben was, but Mrs. Parker never came near. I was afraid she'd

offer to nurse, and I told Mark so, just to see what he'd say. He wouldn't say a thing against her, but life would certainly have been a burden for him if she'd come into his house to nurse. He excused her by talking about the nervous shock she had, what with the telegram, and Ben's coming, and his being taken sick, and Mary's engagement being broken, and all. I wonder if he thought I didn't know that she herself broke off Mary's engagement. I asked what he knew about Frank Brown, and if he had heard anything about what he thought of the breaking of the engagement, but he said Frank had gone into the country to do a big job of painting the day after the supper and wasn't back yet. Thought he'd be gone several weeks, for he had all the buildings at the county insane asylum to do.

"We didn't stay long at Mark's, and we went on down to the hall, for we wanted to get there early and get good seats where we could see everybody come in, and we wanted to get where Jim could hear. You know your pa is getting a little bit deef in his left ear. He always was a little slow about hearing and understanding things, but he is getting worse, now. Of course, getting there so early, we'd have to sit in those same chairs till we was all tired out, but we wouldn't be half so

tired if we had our pick of the places, or at least we wouldn't have any excuse for thinking some other chairs was softer than ours.

"We got seats pretty well down in front, the very front ones being reserved for the 'mourners,' as Mark Williams calls the parents, because he says they always look so mournful to see their young ones growing up. Well, they feel mournful, or at least we did when we sat down in front two years, no, three years ago, and watched Frankie get up to speak his piece. I was so scared for fear he'd forget, and yet he knew the thing perfectly. It was about the discovery of chloroform, and he had it all done and learned two weeks before the time for it, and he was so sick and tired of it, and so was I, from hearing him say it around the house, that I never wanted to hear those words again. But he got through all right, which is more than some of the youngsters did yesterday.

"I never saw the hall looking prettier. The colours of the class were silver and blue, and they had their motto put up across the front of the hall in letters covered with tin-foil on a blue background. It looked mighty pretty, only it would have looked lots better if they had called in some of us old fogies who know how to spell, for they had staring us in the face this motto, 'PURPOSE GREAT,

A-C-H-E-I-V-E-MENT GREATER,' and I couldn't get my eyes off that word any more than I could fly. Of course, not more than a dozen or so of us old folks noticed that, for they are so busy nowadays teaching the youngsters to sing, and to draw, and ninety-nine other foolish things, that they haven't any time for the little old spelling-book. You can have your kindergarten, and all that sort of thing you want, but give me the little blue-backed speller we used to use when I was young. This sticking peas on wires, and weaving straw into baskets may be all right, and just the thing, but I want my grandchildren to be able to spell, and do mental arithmetic, and read, and know some geography, enough so they know what a map is for, and I guess they'll go about as far as these kindergarten youngsters. Well, if I get started on that I'm good for all day, so I'll switch off, now.

"I almost wished we'd gone later when old Mr. and Mrs. Bacon came in and planted themselves behind us. He doesn't know anything, and she never opens her mouth, so you can't tell whether she does or not, but I don't think she does, for I've noticed it's the empty box that's least often opened. He hadn't more than got seated when he began reading his programme. '"Vocal — music — by — Miss — Edith — Knox." What sort of

instrument is that? Do you know, Sapphiry?' turning to his wife. She shook her head, and he leaned over my shoulder. 'Say, Mis' Bell, what's this vocal, Edie Knox is goin' to play on? Is that one of those new-fangled things that you turn a crank?' A high school boy next to him told him, and it was only a minute or two before he broke out again, and that small boy was kept busy for the next few minutes telling him things. About the class colours, and what they had them for, and what 'salutatory' meant, and then the class came on the stage and he shut up for a minute.

"My, but they did look nice, the girls all in white, and the boys all in black, and all looking as solemn as if they was listening to their own funeral sermons. Then the thing began. Edith Knox sang something about 'Oh, Silent Night,' and her mother looked as smiling over on one side the hall, as if Edith's voice didn't break every time she tried to take a high note. She would have done all right in an old-fashioned singing-school, but her fancy city teacher had taught her only these high-faluting pieces, and her voice wasn't fit for them. When she got done, one fellow two or three rows from me, a stranger in town, said to the woman he was with, the new hotel-keeper's wife, it was, 'Her voice is like Colorado air. The higher up

you go the thinner it gets.' I wish I had sat nearer to him. I bet I wouldn't have got so sleepy, for he kept that woman giggling all the way through. Then one of the girls gave the 'salutatory.' That's kind of an opening, but I didn't hear one word she said, for one of the girl ushers' sashes had come untied and about six of them was trying their best to get it tied so it would look right, and the ribbon was cut so skimpin' that it wouldn't look right. There wasn't enough to go 'round her and to tie in a bow, too. If it had only been one it would have done all right, but the bow wouldn't give up to the sash, and the sash wouldn't give way to the bow. But it was this girl's turn to carry up flowers, so she had to have it tied before the girl that was speaking got through. They both got done at the same time, and the speaker got some awfully pretty baskets, two or three. I forgot, though, to tell you how they used our pinies. They had great bunches of them in big jars at the corners of the stage, and they looked fine.

"Next Walter Thornton had a piece, oration, the programme called it, on 'Benedict Arnold and Aaron Burr.' He was in my class once, and he's the funniest boy in Sunday school I ever saw, but he was the dryest speaker that whole afternoon. I saw one or two places where he was leading up to

something that might have been made real funny, but every time he'd shy off, and I knew that old principal had cut out everything but just the dry facts.

"When he got through, old Mr. Bacon, behind us, heaved a big sigh, and said to the little boy beside him, 'That's a right smart boy. Now what's the next programme on the list?' Lucky thing I had my fan so I could hide my face, for I nearly went up when I heard that. Jim thought I was fainting or something, and wanted to know if I wanted any water, but I finally choked the laugh down and listened to the next speaker, a little girl of about fifteen who talked to us about 'What Woman Owes to the State, and What the State Owes to Woman.' Even Jim saw the joke in that, for he leaned over to whisper, 'Out of the mouths of babes.' My chair was getting right hard by this time, so I didn't hear very much of what was said, but I knew what it was, for I knew her mother, the leading woman's rights woman in the county, and had heard her speak at school meetings and such several times, and I remembered what had been told me once about her husband staying up till two o'clock one night taking care of this same little girl that was talking here, when she had the croup, and her mother was off lecturing to the

County Woman's Rights Association at Laketon. Lucky thing the pieces was all short, for it was getting pretty hot in that hall, and the windows was so stopped up with boys and men sitting in them that no air could get in. But there was twelve altogether, ranging from 'X-rays' to the 'Division of China,' the last by a boy whose voice was in the high-low stage, where one sentence would be in his soprano voice and the next in his deepest bass, and some of them mixed. 'Beyond the Alps Lies Italy' was dealt with by a girl whose family always had been so shiftless that it would have done her more good to have thought some on the subject, 'Beyond Marriage Lies the Wash-tub.' 'The Poetry of Keats,' by a round-faced Dutch girl, was followed by 'Character-building,' by a great, big, overgrown lummux of a boy that tripped twice in getting from his chair to the front of the platform, and then forgot once or twice and had to be prompted. At last the 'valedictory' came, and I never was gladder to hear anything in all my life. I knew we wasn't anywhere near done yet, for after that came some piano-playing, and then the president of the school board got up to give the youngsters their diplomas. He was a lawyer, but, of course, as this isn't election year, he wanted to get in a little politics in general and not anything in par-

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ticular. He was tall and lean, and always prided himself on looking like Lincoln, so he made himself awkwarder than he usually was, which was pretty hard, and mussed up his hair, and talked for a solid half-hour about the value to the State at large of the training these young people had had, and the value to their home town and county especially, and wound up, after everybody was worn out, with an appeal for honest thinkers to come to the polls, and vote for the best interests of the State, meaning for himself as candidate for district attorney the next election.

"I said there were twelve that spoke, but there wasn't but eleven. Tilda Ward was at home lying on the bed in her room crying herself sick, so she probably wouldn't be able to enjoy the class picnic that was coming Saturday. I heard her mother telling about it, and I felt so sorry for the poor girl that I could have cried, too.

"She was down at the hall with the rest of the class in the morning finishing up the decorations, and rehearsing for the last time, and all. She got home to dinner about half-past eleven, and she had her dress all laid out in her sister's room down-stairs so she could dress in a hurry after dinner. They was all sitting at the table when somebody heard a noise and rushed out into the hall.

They found the outside screen door open, but didn't see anything, so they looked around a little, and what did they see but in the room where the dress was lay a strange dog, all mud, right on the bed on top of that new muslin dress, and ribbons, and stockings, and new parasol, and everything. The dog bolted when they first came in, but Willie chased him half a mile, while Tilda sat on the floor and cried. After all the time she had spent on writing her essay on 'Joan of Arc,' and reading all the books she had to read when she wanted to read 'St. Elmo,' that was lent to her for just ten days, then to have her commencement and her dress and parasol and all spoiled, spoiled by a dog, and a strange dog at that! Well, she didn't cry herself sick, but almost, though she was sitting up reading the last chapters of that book when I stopped in on the way home to tell her all about things.

"Now, Katie, I am afraid I haven't given you a fair show to talk, but I'm getting along in this jacket for Bessy where I've got to count stitches, so you'll have a chance now. Tell me how things are going on the farm."

"Now, Mother Bell, you know I like to hear you talk, so you don't need to worry about my not saying anything. I get enough chance to do talking to the youngsters. Bessy is just getting to the

age where anybody would think her name was 'Bessy Don't' instead of 'Bessy Bell.' But your story of the girl's dress spoiled reminds me of an experience I had. It was too funny for anything to the rest of us, but poor Bertie didn't think it was one bit funny.

"You remember one year I stayed with my Aunt Jo over at Clover Brook. Bertie was her son, the oldest. I used to take care of the youngest children almost entirely, for the work was something enormous, and we couldn't get any help that was any good. Aunt Pris, she wasn't married, you know, she lived there, too, and took care of the dairy, and between us, we got most of the work done, though we were kept busy, I can tell you.

"One day in the summer Bertie was invited to a party about four miles away, and he said first he couldn't go. Didn't have any clothes. He was just about the age where boys begin to shoot up, and they hadn't bought any clothes for him for some time, thinking it no use to buy clothes for him to outgrow before he could get them half worn out. He was short and pudgy, and just about as big around as he was long. Finally they decided that he could go to town with his pa and get some pants, but he must get them long enough so they could be let down as he grew taller. He was so

big around, anyway, he'd have to get them long in order to get them big enough around.

"Along about supper-time he and his pa came home. Bertie hurried in to change his clothes to do his chores, and brought in his bundle. I was busy getting the babies ready for bed, and knew I would be busy for some time, so when he told me he wanted those pants taken up just two inches, I told him I couldn't do it, I had the youngsters to bathe and put to bed, and I was afraid it would be too late before I got done. There were four of them, so the job wasn't so short a one, and all the four had been running barefoot and playing in the garden all day. I see he was disappointed, but he hung the pants on a hook in the wardrobe, and skipped up-stairs to change. I worked as fast as I could, and when I got through with the two youngest, and got them to bed, I left the others, and skipped up-stairs and fixed those pants in a rush. There was a flat-iron on the kitchen stove, so I got them pressed and hung up again before the youngsters got away, so I didn't have to hunt them up again. After while, I got all four of them to bed and asleep, and got back down-stairs to help with the dishes, for poor Aunt Jo was tired out, I knew. I was mighty glad I had fixed Bertie's pants, for the boys at the next place were coming

for him at eight o'clock and wouldn't wait, for they had a good drive before them. While we was working at the dishes, Bertie came rushing in, gave his face and hands a scrub at the kitchen wash-basin, and started up-stairs. He stopped at the wardrobe in the dining-room and got his pants, and ran up the stairs to his room. In about fifteen minutes and just as I saw the Roberts boys, the ones that was coming after him, coming up the lane, I heard Bertie come tearing down the stairs and across the dining-room to the kitchen door. He burst the door open, and began, 'See here, Katie, what kind of a joke is this? Pretty time for jokes, and the boys right here. What do you mean by taking up these pants a foot?' I sat down and laughed. There he stood with about a foot of leg showing down below those pants which came about half-way down his calves. Just then his mother came in and when she saw him she said, 'Why, Bertie, didn't you say two inches? Wasn't that too much?' Then Aunt Pris came in from the dairy and when she saw him she blurted out, 'Why, Bertie, you meant to let them down two inches, didn't you?' And then the story came out. When I refused to do the job, he went to his aunt, and she, too, refused, then he went to his mother and she said she would fix them. Before she got around

to it, I had already done so, and she turned them up another two inches, and finally Aunt Pris slipped in from the dairy and added another two inches to the hem at the bottom.

"Well, it didn't take long to remedy that mistake. I sent Aunt Pris to talk to the boys. She always was a favourite with them, and in about two minutes, just long enough for Bertie to step into the dining-room and slip off those pants, we had them, letting them down four inches, his mother at one leg and I at the other. In ten minutes we had him started, and he enjoyed it all the more for his little accident. But we've had many a good laugh over the turn-up of Bertie's pants."

CHAPTER IX.

ON BEING A GRANDMOTHER

"Do you know, Katie, the more I see of what you have to contend with, the more I realize the advantages of being a grandmother? I suppose we all try to see how much we gain by being ourselves, or we'd have a pretty hard time thinking about other folks' advantages over us, but I never realized so fully just what advantages a grandmother has over a mother till now.

"In the first place if the children aren't brought up properly, the grandmother gets none of the blame except in a general way when folks say, 'Why, of course, how could you expect the child to be anything but spoiled, with a whole set of grandparents?' But the mother, if anything goes wrong, gets blamed by her husband's folks, and all the neighbours and friends, and then, when the children are sick and cross, does the grandmother have to be up with them night after night, and then have all the work to do days? Oh, no,

it's the mother that works twenty-four hours a day, and nurses them all through chicken-pox, and whooping-cough, and measles, and all the rest, and then when she's got them raised half-way decently, the proud grandmother carries them off and shows them. 'My grandchildren? Yes, they're Johnnie's children. Aren't they pretty, and see how well-behaved,' and so on, till the folks at the picnic, or fair, or Fourth of July, would lose their appetites for dinner if they weren't all just the same about their grandchildren. And all the time the poor mother is staying at home hustling around taking care of the littler ones, and, like as not, worrying over 'what new meanness that young one is going to learn at his grandma's.' And he does learn meanness, for how can he help it? First there's grandpa, and he and the children do tease each other so. Then grandma sometimes forgets that their little stomachs can't stand all her good cooking that's so different from the plain, hearty fare on the farm, and, besides, there's all the aunts, each trying her best to spoil the young ones in a different way, and the uncles just as bad. Seems as if the best kind of a family to raise children in, would be one where the grandparents' youngest children and their oldest children's children all came along together, and there weren't any

old maid aunts and bachelor uncles to spoil the youngsters. That must have been the way in the days of the patriarchs.

"But to get back to the grandmother's side of the question. She can come out from town and sit down and visit awhile, and play with the babies awhile, and then, when she gets tired of their noise, she can just drive back to town and leave the whole caboodle of them. But the poor mother, after the grandmother goes, has to straighten out the one that's howling at the top of his voice because he couldn't go with his grandmother, and by that time there's the baby awake and crying, and then it's supper-time, and there are half a dozen to get supper for, and that night it comes out that the grandmother, in her superior wisdom, has fed the middle youngster too much cookie, or some other thing just as bad for its little stomach, and the mother has to be up half the night with that sick baby. And all the time the grandmother is saying to grandpa and the aunts, 'How easy a time Lissy,' or whatever her name is, 'has. She has a woman to help her, and I used to always do all my own work, and raised all you babies, too.' She never realizes that her babies didn't have a grandmother around to spoil them, and ruin their digestions, for in those days grandmothers had their

work to do just like other people, and that her own sisters, instead of getting to be old maid aunts, had babies of their own to attend to, so they didn't have time to spoil hers. And she goes on and kicks sometimes about the looks of her daughter-in-law. 'I don't see how Harry ever fell in love with her. One of these scared kind whose eyes stick out so you can poke them with a stick.' Of course they do, and every sleepless night when she has to stay up with those babies makes her eyes stick out worse. Then maybe the grandmother begins to say something to Harry about Lissy's looks, and says, 'Just see how bright and pretty Jessie Brown is. Now, if you'd married her—' and so on, till poor Harry is unhappy, and Lissy is unhappy, and the babies are unhappy.

"Oh, the grandmother does have an easy time, and that's the reward that comes to the mother. The poor woman will toil away for years and never have a minute's ease, and it seems as if she's all worn out doing for others, giving them her mother's love.

"Do you know, I almost think sometimes, Katie, that the Bible isn't translated just right. If it was, it would read, 'God, the Mother.' That's so much nearer than 'God, the Father.' Father's love, maybe, was different in Bible times, but from

all the stories of Hagar and the rest, seems as if 'God, the Mother' wouldn't be far off.

"Now to go back to the mother who has given up the best years of her life to the children, and seems all broken and worn. It hardly seems more than a month or two since her boy was a baby in her arms, and he cut his teeth just the other week, and only yesterday, it seems like, he had his first pants with pockets in, and now, he's — married. And his mother just knows he won't be happy, and way down in her heart she almost — not quite — hopes he won't be. Then, first thing she knows, there's the baby, and she didn't see as there was any place for that baby, but — yes, of course she'd go and see it, not that she cared anything about it, but it wouldn't look right not to, and then — 'Why, it surely can't be time to go yet. I've only been here a minute.' But it is time to go, and though she has heard all the nurse can tell, and all the shy, but beautifully happy mother can say, and has seen the baby weighed, and bathed, and fed, and has stayed full four hours, the time has seemed but a minute, and all the way home she raves over that grandbaby till the proud grandpa — oh, yes, he's proud, too, but he wouldn't let on, till he makes fun of her, and says things to remind her that just a week before there wasn't any place for

a baby, and that Johnnie's wife — and so on, till he has her almost crying, what with happiness, nerves, and teasing.

"But the next day, he is just as ready as she to go to see the boy, and then, what a casting about for names. There's the family names on Effie's side, and the family names on Johnnie's side, and all the friends make suggestions, and finally, Effie, no longer so shy and scared of Johnnie's mother, whispers to her that she wants her to name the boy, then the hatchet, that, while never flourished, was always a something that threw a shadow over both of them, well, that hatchet's buried, and the family, with 'the boy,' as grandpa calls him, finally named, goes on its accustomed way.

"Oh, it's great to be a grandmother, and I'm not sure but what it's just a little better to be a stepgrandmother. If anything doesn't go right, if the youngsters are a little stupid, or squint-eyed, or anything, why, if you're a grandmother, the folks will trace back to you and to your family, and it kind o' hurts when they find anything. But when you're only a stepgrandmother, you can love the babies just as much, and then you don't get any of the blame for anything further than the raising of your own stepchildren. But you do get blamed for that. You've heard Jimmie tell

how I broke him of using tobacco, haven't you? Well, one of the boarders over at the Millers' heard about that, and she wrote it up for a paper, and sent me a copy. She talked about my brutality and everything till I was mad as a hornet, but then I thought that there was two ways of looking at everything, one from the inside and one from the outside, and I got all over my mad, and got Frankie to write and thank her for the paper, and said I hoped she'd some day have the chance to try breaking some stepchildren of smoking, and I'd like to hear her methods and results. I haven't heard yet.

"Last fall at the fair, I don't remember whether or not I told you, I was carrying little Bessy, and I ran on to some folks I met after I went to town. They were the palavery kind, so they soon got around to how much she looked like me, and what a fine-looking baby, and all that. I couldn't blame them for admiring her, for she's the dearest baby I ever saw, except little Jimmie, but of course I always did have a special fondness for boys. Finally they got around again to how much she looked like me, and I said, then, kind of surprised, and as if it was something really wonderful, 'Yes, isn't it nice that she does? What features does she resemble me in most?' And then they both began,

one to say the eyes, and the other the mouth, and the first one was sure her hair was like mine, and so on, till I couldn't stand it any longer, and I blurted right out, 'Now, don't you think it's simply wonderful that she should be so much like me, when, after all, she's only my stepgrandbaby?' That settled them.

"Yes, stepgrandmother or grandmother, what's the odds? There's some stepmothers more motherly than mothers, and I suppose there's some stepgrandmothers more grandmotherly than real grandmothers. Perhaps they realize better the way the mother of a child feels toward the grandmother, or any one else who has some rights in regard to the child, but yet has none of the responsibilities.

"Speaking of responsibilities, I want to tell you something that I never told you yet. Do you remember last year when you and Jimmie went to the wedding at the Merrills'? Let me see, that was a couple that met at your wedding, wasn't it? And there I stayed at home with the baby so you could go to their wedding, and I expect that next summer they'll be getting somebody to stay at home with their baby while they go to the wedding of somebody else, that met at their wedding. Seems as if there must be a sort of endless chain of these weddings. John and Sue get married, and Jimmie

and Kate — that's so, you did meet at the Parsons's wedding, didn't you, and Nellie Merrill met Harry Smith at yours, didn't she? and I suppose the chain is still going. I shouldn't wonder, if you went at it right, if you could trace the line that way clear back to John Smith, or whoever it was first settled this country. Only some of those runaway marriages would be bound to come in. I tell you they're a thing I don't believe in. If I was going to marry a man I'd marry him right out before folks, or I wouldn't marry him. Oh, your pa's case and mine don't count. He was just a widower, and, besides, the boys was there.

"But I wouldn't have any secret marriage as if we was ashamed of it, and if my folks objected I'd get around them one way or another. There ain't anybody so sharp you can't get ahead of them some way, and that honestly, too. And it makes it lots harder for them, to have folks get around them honestly, than the other way. But there come Jim and Jimmie, so I expect I'd better tell you what I was going to without more ado, for I guess Jim wants to start right back as soon as he can get hitched up.

"You remember when you went to Nellie Merrill's wedding I stayed with Bessy. You had weaned her then, so she could stand your being

away. Some of her teeth were just coming through, I remember, and she was so fretful. It was as hot as could be for September, and yet you had on her heaviest flannel skirt. She fretted all day, and seemed just to be suffering from the heat. You left early, I remember, and about ten the poor little thing looked so hot and worn out that I just couldn't stand it to see her suffer so from the heat. I took her up and gave her a drink of cold water, but that didn't relieve her for very long and she kept on fretting. I got it into my head she was just too hot, so I hunted out a lighter flannel skirt. Then I got all ready to change and had her on my lap when I began to think, 'What if anything should happen?' So I put her down and laid the skirt away in the drawer again. In less than half an hour I had that skirt out again, and that time I got the heavy skirt unpinned. Then I got skairt again. 'What did I know about babies, anyway? Never had any of my own and only helped raise the neighbours'?' So I laid that skirt back in the drawer again and got dinner for us both. It kept getting hotter and hotter, and before one o'clock I had that skirt out again, and even had it on down over the other one all ready to slip the heavy one off, when I thought again, 'Now, if they shouldn't get home to-night, and she should have the croup, what do

I know about taking care of her? Maybe there isn't any ipecac in the house, and maybe hot lard won't help her.' So I put that skirt back in the drawer quick, and locked the drawer, and put the key up on top the big wardrobe where I had to stand on top the table to put it.

"Finally I got her to sleep and then I saw you coming, and I hustled and got the key down, and by the time you was home everything was all right. Then that evening when she waked up and I saw you put on that lighter skirt, I thought that, after all, if anything should happen, I wouldn't be to blame. And I lay awake till near midnight that night listening to hear her croupy cough, and I was mighty glad I didn't hear it. But, do you know, I am just as sure as I am that I'm sitting here that if I'd changed that skirt, Bessy would have had the croup and maybe died. So you see, there's disadvantages as well as advantages in being a grandmother, and especially a stepgrandmother."

CHAPTER X.

FOURTH OF JULY

"THE morning of the Fourth I got up early, and I might as well, for there wasn't any sleep to be had after four o'clock, what with firecrackers and horns and guns. Seems as if they might celebrate some other way than with so much noise so early in the morning. I was glad to get the early start, though, for I hadn't got as far along with the dinner I was going to take as I would have liked, and this gave me a chance to catch up. Of course, it wouldn't take a great deal just for us three, but I always want to have enough so I can invite in everybody I see to help eat, and there's plenty that's glad to get some of my cooking. Then Frankie's appetite isn't a little one by any means since he's got home, and when he gets started on a fried chicken, well — there's usually the bones left, and that's all.

"By ten o'clock we was down-town. Jim drove down and then went home with the team. He

wasn't going to come down till time for dinner. I wanted to go early to get a good place to see everybody. There's one tree in the court-house yard that's the best place to see from, and I'd had that place for two years now. Got it the first year after we moved to town, and kept it ever since. They always build the platform near enough so you can hear the speaker if you want to, and yet far enough away so you can talk right through his speech without disturbing anybody. Then on the other side, you can look right out over the square, so as to see the parade, and, besides, everybody has to pass within ten feet on the way to the water-barrels, so you can see every last soul that's there sometime during the day. And, best of all, it's shady there all the time.

"Frankie went down when I did, for since he got home, I can't get him ten feet away from my apron-strings, but I didn't need him, and I didn't want him around when I wanted to visit, so I sent him after Mary Parker for two reasons, first, because it would please her and her mother, for Frankie, since he's been away to medical college, is even more popular than he used to be among the folks in town, and then, too, I knew Frank Brown would be in town that day, and I had plans. Frank hadn't been home since the day the engagement was

broken, and I was pretty sure that he'd be mighty glad to see Mary. I'd invited Mrs. Parker to eat dinner with us, too, so I thought it quite proper for Frankie to go after them. They lived right near the square, so it wasn't far for him to go.

" I hadn't more than got settled when who should come along but Mark Williams. I got up and went over to the walk to talk to him, for, of course, he couldn't run his chair among those plank seats. I wanted to know how Ben Parker was.

" Mark was looking pretty well worn out himself, I suppose from staying in so much. He said for a week he hadn't been down-town even, but had to run down this morning (he lived only four blocks from the square) to see about some business. Ben, he said, was still bad at times, although this was nineteen days after he came home, and altogether it looked like a mighty bad case. He said the nurse was fine, and knew just what to do, and Doctor Jefferson, who had charge of the case, seemed mighty well pleased with her. I asked him if the Parkers ever came to see Ben, and he said, ' Tommy comes every day, and Mary came two or three times, but never a word have I heard from Mrs. Parker. Poor woman! She must feel the trouble terribly, but she's too proud to let it be seen. But Tommy is more of a man than

I ever thought.' I was surprised at that, for Mark never ran anybody down the least bit, and it sounded almost as if he were going to do so now. But he didn't. He just went on, 'Mary Parker is looking mighty bad. I wonder if it's altogether Ben's sickness.' And I said, 'No, indeed! That makes a good explanation, but I know what's the matter with her and I'm going to do something for her to-day.'

"He had to hurry on. I never get a chance to say half to him I want to. But I certainly do enjoy talking with him. He is so fair to everybody. I believe if anybody lives up to the Golden Rule, it's him. I used to think what a wonderful man he would have been if he hadn't been hurt, and then I've thought maybe he wouldn't have been anything wonderful at all, and that it was like some fruits that are bitter and hard until they're frosted. It took just that misfortune to make him sweet and tender. And it's wonderful to see how sweet and gentle he is. I've seen him when he was talking of some great thing that he had hoped to do, and his face lighted up till he was perfectly beautiful, and then, as he moved his hand, he happened to touch his twisted, weak legs, and his head dropped as he realized his helplessness, and I sat with my hands clenched, fighting back the temptation to be

bitter for him, but suddenly his face would lose that hurt, disappointed look, and grow so gentle and bright, and there was never a word of regret over his misfortune.

" He hadn't been gone long before Frankie came back with Mary. Her mother couldn't be down till afternoon, for she had to finish a dress for Jennie to wear in the parade. She was to be one of the 'blue' girls on the big float of the States. Mary looked to me as if she could have gone in for that without putting on a blue dress, for she looked all worn out. I told her how Ben was, and she brightened up some, and she and Frankie began to talk a little. Then I saw a whole raft of folks that I hadn't seen since Old Folks' Picnic last year, and I was busy with them till the speaking began. I didn't care for any of that, so I sat back against my tree, and talked to old Mrs. Fowler from over to Oak Creek where I used to live, you know. She hadn't had a chance to talk about folks there for a couple of years, for she's moved to Waterville now, so we made our tongues fly. I heard about people I hadn't heard of since I moved away, and I could tell her about people she hadn't heard of. It was all right when they was speaking. They didn't disturb us, and we didn't disturb them, but it really seemed as if we wouldn't get any more than started

before the band would strike up and we'd just have to shout. I never heard a band play so much nor so often. And once when she was telling me about some neighbours of hers that used to live down by the canal, the band stopped short and she went right on real loud so you could hear her clear down on the platform, 'Everybody knew 'twas just the itch.' She was saying they called it by some fancy name. Well, everybody just yelled when they heard her, and she was so mad she wouldn't say another word, but just gathered her six grandchildren around her, and marched off.

"It was dinner-time soon, and Jim showed up and Frankie disappeared. He'd had his orders and I knew he'd carry them out, and never let on, so I was as surprised as could be, seemingly, when back he came with Frank Brown. 'Ma, here's Frank. You remember how he likes fried chicken. He says he'll eat with us.' I watched Mary, and she looked mighty pleased, then so scared that I pitied her. Frank and she spoke to each other, and she turned and began talking to me, and Frank began talking to Jim and Frankie, but I knew they didn't half know what they was saying. Just talking to show they didn't care, when all the time they did. Then Frank began to excuse himself, and Mary whispered to me, 'Really, I must go home, Mrs. Bell. I fear

— mother — ' But I pretended not to hear her and handed Frank a plate of fried chicken. He couldn't very well set down the plate and run, so he held it till I had the other things out. I spread a table-cloth and handed things out to Mary, who just had to set them down. Jim was asking Frank questions, and I noticed she listened right sharp for the answers, even though she did want to get away so bad. In a minute I had everything spread out, and all seated 'round the cloth, Jim next to me on one side, then Mary, then Frankie, and Frank next to me on the other side. Mary and Frank were very polite, and it was ' Mr. Brown ' and ' Miss Mary,' and I saw Frankie trying hard not to giggle. The minute I see that, I sent him off after a pot of coffee, and then I turned to Jim and got him to talking. Everybody else was gathered in other groups eating as fast as they could, so they didn't notice us at all. Jim wanted to eat, but I made him talk, so we left Mary and Frank to themselves. Of course it was hard work to talk to Jim, and make him talk, and to hear what they were saying, but, of course, I had to hear what they said, so as to know what further treatment to give. Doctors' privileges are more than other folks, but so are their duties, and since I'd taken on myself the duties, I

thought I ought to get all the privileges. So I listened.

"Jim was telling about the speech and had got as far as the first funny story (I had wondered what they had all laughed at), when I heard Frank say 'Mary.' If I don't deserve a leather medal for not looking that way, I never deserved one. Then she said, 'Better have some more chicken, Mr. Brown, here's the heart —' I knew she wished she hadn't said it a minute later when he said, while I was making noise with a spoon in a baked bean dish, 'That isn't the kind of heart I want. I want to be sure that I have the one I thought I had. Tell me. Have I?' and he leaned over toward her so quickly that he tipped a jar of cold tea all over the table-cloth. Mary started up at that, and of course I had to look around. Frankie came back just then with the coffee, and we sat down to finish dinner, but I noticed Mary moved over to let Frankie sit next to Jim, and when we weren't looking it took longer for them to hand dishes to each other than was altogether necessary. Yes, Katie, I see you recognize the symptoms. Well, you'll need to when Bessy and Jimmie 'Three,' as Frankie will call him, grow up. Then I noticed, too, once when Jim, Frankie, and I got to talking, that she said, 'No, no, Frank, mother'll be down soon and

we mustn't let her see us together.' 'But how?' he started, but she shook her head at him. 'Can we trust Willie?' he asked, and she nodded.

"I don't think it was generally known about the engagement having been broken, for several girls stopped to talk with Mary, and they didn't seem any surprised at seeing Frank there.

"I sent the boys off after a while and packed up the basket and set it under the seat. Then I sat down, and while we was waiting for the parade, I had a good, hearty talk with Mary. Just about things in general, and I cheered her up till, what with Frank's coming back, and her laughing so much at my nonsense, she was as cheerful as I ever saw her.

"About two her mother came, and I gave her the best seat next the tree and set out to entertain her. She wasn't in the best of humour, for she hadn't got the dress done till late, and Tommy hadn't come home to dinner at all, and she was hot from walking, but I sent Jim, who had come back again, after some ice-cream for her, and gave her a fan, and soon she was as cheerful as Mary had been.

"Meanwhile, the parade came past, and it was just the same old kind. Men on horseback so afraid they'd fall off they didn't dare let their horses gallop. Then callithumpians with masks, and

rags, and horns, sounding worse than a shivaree. After them came a float of Cuba chained and Columbia advancing to free her. I knew who arranged that, for they'd had it every year for the past five years just because one of the girls in town looks fine as the girl in chains with short sleeves and hair down her back. Then a drum corps, followed by the mayor and the speaker in a buggy, then some bicycles fixed up fancy, only they had to go so slow the riders all kept falling off and starting over again. After this came the float of the States, and Mrs. Parker pretty near stared her eyes out to see how Jennie looked, and nearly had a fit when she saw how her dress hung, only, as Mary told her, 'that wasn't Jennie at all. That was Jennie on the other corner,' but it was out of sight before she got fixed in her mind which one really was Jennie. If I had to wear glasses I'd get some that I could see with, and not pay so much for the gold bows, that I had to get cheap glasses to even up with.

"I went out to the path to talk with old Mrs. Jones, who was going by on her crutches, and when I got back Mary and her mother had been talking about Ben, for I heard Mrs. Parker say, 'Well, I am glad he's better. Maybe he can tell now something about that telegram. And don't let me hear of

you speaking to Frank Brown again, anyway. Sassing me the way he did. Nice husband he'd make!' But I came up just then and I made up my mind that if I could help it, she shouldn't hear of it, but that Mary should go on speaking to him just as often as I could arrange for it. And I began to arrange right away.

"Mrs. Parker had begun to complain of her head aching, so I asked her to go home with me. Living where we do in the edge of town, our house is mighty quiet, and I said, 'Now it will be noisy here and around your house till after the fireworks, anyway. Suppose you come down to our house, and have some tea, and lie down. Then when the fireworks is over and it's quiet again, Jim will drive you home. He don't mind, and you'll rest.' She was glad to do it, so while she was telling Mary some things to do when she went home to get the children's lunch, I sent Jim after Frankie, who was with a crowd of young fellows on the court-house steps. When he came I took him off to one side and gave him his instructions.

"I told him Mrs. Parker was going home with us, and then went on: 'Now, Jennie Parker tells her mother everything she knows, and lots she only guesses, so I want you to devote yourself to her to-night.' He objected, but I told him he had to.

'I want Frank and Mary to have this evening to themselves, and if Jennie sees them together she'll tell, and her mother will raise Cain. Now you and Frank can arrange it to suit yourselves, you can divide the square and court-house yard, or you can signal by whistle. I don't care how, but I want you to take care that Jennie doesn't see them together. I'll send Mrs. Parker home at eleven, so you'd better tell Frank to take Mary home by half-past ten, so he'll have half an hour to say "good-bye" in, and don't you bring Jennie home till after eleven.'

"He didn't like it very much, but I made him promise, and I knew he'd do as I said. I knew he and Frank already had a signal whistle, for they were great friends, so they could keep out of each other's way.

"We soon got home, and after a cup of tea and a rest, Mrs. Parker was ready to be entertained, and I talked myself deef, dumb, and blind trying to keep her interested, and I did. Jim was ready at eleven, so we started home with Mrs. Parker. We thought the fireworks was all over. We had just got to the corner beyond the Parkers' when I see Mary and Frank coming from toward the square, and walking real slow. I was stumped for half a second. To think of those fool youngsters over-

staying the time, and now they'd be caught and everything would be found out, and I wouldn't be able to help them any more. Then I had an idea. I leaned out toward them, for I knew neither Jim nor Mrs. Parker could see, and I hollered, 'Hurry up, Frankie, and you can ride home.' They looked up, then calmly turned around as if they hadn't heard. Jim said, 'I knew that wasn't Frankie. That man's bow-legged.' Mrs. Parker said, 'Was that Frankie? I couldn't make out.' Just then a last rocket went sailing up, up, up, and I thought Jim's team would follow it, for they weren't used to such things, and they lit out around the corner and down a side street. It was at least a block before Jim had them down again. Then he drove back to the Parkers', and we said 'good night' to Mrs. Parker, and drove off. I hoped the youngsters had taken the opportunity to get home, and I found out they had, for as we drove away I saw Frank step out from behind the lilacs at the gate and walk away.

"Frankie had a good time in spite of his having to be nice to Jennie, and he told me when he got home about the time they had keeping apart. He had arranged the whistle signal with Frank, and then he went to Parker's after Jennie, and they were just out of the way when Frank went after

Mary. Jennie was hardly down to the square when she insisted on going home for a handkerchief. Frankie objected, thinking the others would not yet be out of the way. She insisted, so he started back, but gave the whistle every block. She, of course, was curious and wanted to know what that was for. He told her they were trying to get a crowd together, and she wanted to know who. He told her a lot of names, and she objected to some of them. While they were discussing, he forgot to whistle, and they were almost at the house before he thought. Then he gave a sudden whistle, and there came an answer from the next street that didn't sound just right, so he was scared to go on, for fear Frank and Mary weren't out of the way. Just then they met a couple of friends, and stopped to talk. The other girl asked what the whistle was and Jennie explained. The boy with the other girl wanted to know what it was (he hadn't noticed it), so he could help get the crowd together. Frankie had a sudden coughing fit just then, and, before he recovered, Willie Parker came along from home. Frankie told him he'd give him a nickel if he'd go home after a handkerchief for Jennie, and although Jennie objected, Willie skipped off, for he told her, 'Oh, yes, you just want him to spend that on you. Awh-h-h!' This gave them

time to get off the whistle subject, but when he gave it again, after they got back to the square, the other fellow imitated it, and before very long the whole square was ringing with that same whistle. Frankie got in with the crowd, for he thought there was safety to Frank and Mary in the noise of the lot of young folks, and he really had a good time. He ran on to Frank after the fireworks, while he and Jennie were on their way home, and he knew she didn't suspect a thing from the things she said to him. Frank said, 'I thought you were whistling for me when I first heard that whistle, but when I heard it so much I got tired of it, and walked out toward the fair ground.' Jennie asked, 'Who were you with to-night? Which one?' but Frank just grinned and said, 'Don't you wish you knew who's staying out near the fair ground?' And Jennie wondered all the way home, but never suspected one bit, and I'm sure Mrs. Parker didn't either.

"The next day Mary came over to see me, and thank me. She said, with tears in her eyes, 'I wish — I wish — that I had a mother like you, then I wouldn't have to be dishonest.' 'No,' I said, 'if you had a mother like me she'd be dishonest for you.'"

CHAPTER XI.

A CALL AT MARK WILLIAMS'S

"I HAD so many things to talk to Mark Williams about, and I hadn't seen him except for those few minutes the morning of the Fourth, that I went down to see him yesterday. He's looking mighty tired with taking care of Ben Parker and all. I never saw him looking so worn out, but he is just as cheerful as ever.

"I went early in the morning. I didn't see as it would make any difference to him what time I came, and, besides, when we get to talking we don't want to stop inside of two or three hours. I'm good for that long myself, and if he wants to say anything, we usually have to run overtime. But he isn't a great talker. Others say he is, but maybe it's only because I don't give him the chance myself.

"Strange, isn't it, how different the same people seem to other people. Perhaps if some folks knew how I was trying to help Mary Parker and Frank Brown to be happy, they'd say I was interfering,

and a hypocrite, making out I like Mrs. Parker, and they'd say I was a gossip if they knew I went to Mark Williams's and talked for two or three hours, and if they knew what I was talking about they'd call me a matchmaker.

"But I'm not interfering, nor a hypocrite, nor a gossip, nor yet a matchmaker. I just want my friends to be happy, and I don't believe they'll get to being happy quite so soon, and maybe not at all, if I don't help them, so I'm helping them, that's all. The Lord helps them that helps themselves, that I know, but he helps them most that helps others most, just the same. And it isn't meddling for me to help them.

"Well, maybe, now you speak of it, perhaps it would seem like meddling if they was to offer to help me. But that's just the difference. It's the offering that makes it meddling. If you just go ahead and do things as if it was all right to do them, and not say a word about it, they'll just realize that you're helping and be thankful, but if you stop and offer, why, then, that shows that you've given the thing some thought, and really makes it seem like meddling. If you want a thing to seem real and true and perfectly natural, just make the thing seem as if it wasn't thought out beforehand at all, but was just done right off the handle, as

the saying is. But that doesn't mean that you mustn't think about the things. Why, goodness gracious, it takes all the more thinking to make it seem as if it was done perfectly natural.

"But there's no need telling you these things. You know them as well as I do, only maybe you've never put them in so many words, and putting things in words is just about the quickest way to bring a thing's true meaning to you.

"Now, I suppose you often thought when you were young, that you'd be married some day. But didn't it give you a shock, and a big one, too, the first time you wrote and told somebody you were going to be married, and then read over what you'd written. I didn't write it down, I remember, till after I was married. Then I wrote to my sister and started the letter, 'Dear sister: I want you to know that I am married —' I stopped right there. It seemed that I was writing to myself as much as to her, and it was as much of a shock to me to see that down in black and white as it must have been to her. I remember the rest of the letter, too. It wasn't a long one. 'He has two boys that need a mother, and he wore socks with holes in the heels. Yours truly, Betsey Howe.' Then I had to add a postscript, for I'd forgotten the important thing. 'His name is Jim Bell, and he has a good

farm.' I never was much on writing. Seems as if things won't say themselves with ink or pencil, but just give them a chance to say themselves in words, and don't they enjoy it?

"Sister wrote back and asked, 'If his name is Jim Bell, how is your name Betsey Howe? I think you do need a guardeen.' And that's what I had done. I had written my name as I'd been writing it off and on for about thirty-five years, and I couldn't change suddenly.

"Where was I and what was I talking about? Oh, yes, at Mark Williams's. He seemed real glad to see me, and ran his chair out in a shady corner of the porch where we could talk without being heard in the sickroom.

"Of course I wanted to hear how Ben was, and I was mighty glad to hear how much better he was getting. Enough so the doctor was reasonably sure he would pull through. But Mark had something else to tell me. He had been wanting to see me for several days, but hadn't been able to get out on account of rain.

"Now he began. 'Do you remember the morning of the Fourth when I saw you? Well, I had just got home that morning when there came a little knock. Everybody was down-town from around here, so I knew it wasn't any of the neigh-

bours. Ben was easy, so I wheeled to the door, and who should I see there but Margaret Lee, who has just returned from Chicago.

"'But, Mrs. Bell,' he went on, 'you don't look surprised enough.' 'No,' I said, 'and I don't feel any more surprised than I look. That's what I came for to-day was to hear what she said. I know she said you could tell me. Didn't she?' He looked almost scared, he was so surprised, so I went on. 'Yes, I advised her to come to you, and she said she would, but she didn't, so when I heard Ben was worse, I managed that she should hear it, too, so I'm not surprised that she came. Now tell me what she said, and what you said.' 'Are you sure you don't know already?' he asked. 'And where's your black cat and broomstick? If you were a witch you couldn't surprise me more.' Then he went on to tell what was said.

"First thing, of course, was the weather. But she soon got through that, and stopped him short when he was going to start another harmless subject. 'How is Ben? Is he really worse?' Of course, that startled him, although she had told him before, and she saw she must explain. So she settled down and told him again what she had told me. Then she went on, 'So you see, Mr. Williams, that I have some right to know about him. Is he well enough

for any one — for me — to see him?' Mark answered, 'Margaret Lee, after your treatment of him, have you the right to see him? Didn't you refuse to see him the last time he tried to see you? Don't you think you forfeited the right to see him?' 'Mr. Williams, does any woman ever forfeit the right to see the man she loves, the man who loves her? If, by my refusal, I drove him away, if, I say, for I know it was only his foolish pride that made him go out to make as much money as I had, then all the more is it my right to help him, to show him that I do care, and that I'm willing, yes, more than willing, to share his fortunes. I didn't know — I knew I cared, but I didn't know how much I cared, until — until I heard he was sick and helpless and without any one to care for him but you — no, I don't mean that, with no one to love him, no one of his own to love him for himself and not just because he's suffering and uncared for. Mayn't I see him? Just see him? It can't do any harm.'

"'But,' Mark stopped her, 'will it do any good? I've heard him tell the whole story over and over in his ravings, "I'm going to marry you when I have as much money as you have," and all the rest, and he's been working all these years for that. Now, what good can it possibly do for him to know now that you can care for him, yes, that you do

care for him, when he's as far as ever, yes, farther, for his health may be seriously broken, from being able to get together a sum of money equal to yours. For he hasn't a cent. In his ravings he told the whole story, three thousand dollars he brought back from the Klondike. Every cent of that went in Chicago. Drugged, robbed, loaded on board a train for home with the ticket he had already bought. Now, what good will it do for you to see him, for him to see you? Will he give up his pride and his ambitions? Can you give up your position and easy circumstances?'

"It was hard for Mark to tell me what followed, but he went on. 'She struck a cruel blow, though she didn't know. "Mark Williams," she said, "do you love any woman? Did you ever love any woman? If so, can you forbid a woman who loves, and is loved, the opportunity to see the man whom she loves and who loves her?"' He shrunk beneath the words, but she went on, 'As for his pride, let me once, just once, take his head in my arms, let his head rest on my shoulder, and let him wake to see my face bending over him, and pride or no pride, fortune or no fortune, he'll know the truth — that I love him, and am willing to marry him if he hasn't a cent.' 'Margaret Lee,' Mark said, 'do you know what people would say of you if they

heard of such a thing?' 'What people would say? Yes, I know. And care not one snap. They would call me forward, shameless, yes, even a bad woman, perhaps, but you will know the truth, I will know, and he will know. Mark Williams, were you ever sick and despairing, hopeless, even, and did the woman you loved come to see you and to help bring you back to seeing things aright, and did some one who thought he knew, did some one who should have left it to the woman's instincts, did such a one drive her away without one word of comfort for you, without a word of pity and comfort for her? If so, have you ever thanked that person? Try to, sometime. Try to feel thankful toward him if you can't thank him in person.'

"It was still harder for Mark, but he went on, 'Margaret, would you be willing to give up what you have so that your fortunes might be equal? He will never consent to any other condition.' She looked at him and smiled as she said, 'Do you think after he's been sick all this time, and, as you say, has been thinking of me and of his future hopes — do you think after he once wakes up and finds me there where I belong, where I am going to stay, that he will stick at a matter of pride? No, I'll not give up my fortune — it's not a fortune, but it's enough to start us very comfortably in the

West, but I'll keep it and we'll use it together, Ben and I. I have given up my pride for him. He will have to give up his pride for me.'

"'After that, what was there to do, Mrs. Bell?' asked Mark. 'That's it. Just nothing. Ben was sleeping quietly, but I knew he wouldn't sleep much longer, and so I let her carry out her plan. No, I didn't let her. She just went ahead and did it, and I sat by and watched.

"'The curtain at the head of the bed she raised a little so the light shone across the bed and full in her face as she knelt beside him, and oh, so gently, slipped her arm beneath his head on which the short hair was just beginning to curl. The slight motion may have roused him, or the unusual light, but he started slightly, then opened his eyes, looked almost startled, closed his eyes as if to be certain he was awake, then, "Margie, Margie, Margie," he whispered slowly.

"'And to me there came, while to him came the realization of happiness, only the realization of the love I had spurned, of the years of happiness I might have had, of the hollowness of life without the great love, of the emptiness of an existence without some *one* to care for. And I wheeled softly out the door.'"

CHAPTER XII.

DOING SOMETHING FOR THE PREACHER

"EVER since Children's Day, when I saw the condition of Mr. Simms's clothes, I've felt that something needed to be done for him and his family. And I know others felt so, too, for they've said as much to me. Finally, last week, two of the women in the church came to me to talk up a surprise party, or something, to take him something. But I wouldn't go in for that at all. I said that the preacher didn't want something fancy to put in the parsonage, and to pay freight on every time he moved. He wanted something they could use. Then they said, 'Well, if you think you know what they want, we'll leave it to you to get it. We'll do our share, but we won't try to go ahead.'

"Now, that was just what I wanted, for I never knew a thing to go that they ran. So I asked them if they thought there would be any

objection to my going ahead and doing just what I thought was right. They said, 'No, indeed. We know, and everybody knows, if you run it, it will be all right.' Now, I don't like taffy, but there's some people that if they ain't scratching your eyes out so you can't see, they're taffying you all over so you're so stuck up you can't see, and I'd a little rather have the scratching, because there I can meet them on equal ground. I don't have any occasion very often to do any scratching, but when I do, the fur flies.

"I sounded one or two more folks on the subject, and they all seemed to agree, so I went and talked to Mark Williams. Then I went down and called on the two printers in town, and the next Saturday when the papers came out, there was this notice:

"'POUND SOCIAL EXTRAORDINARY!!!

The Rev. Orlando Simms and family will be "pounded" in an entirely new way, at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. James Bell' (that's us), 'on next Wednesday evening. Come early and stay late. Bring your wife and all your babies. One or more pounds of something *of some value* will be expected from each. Out of courtesy to guests outside the church no collection will be taken, but you'd better bring your pocketbooks with something in them.

MARK WILLIAMS WILL SING!!!'

"One printer was going to charge me for printing the notice, but I asked him if he didn't go to our church. He said he did, and enjoyed it, but that they had an agreement between the printers to charge for all church notices, so, of course — 'See here,' I said, 'how many pounds of paper and how much ink will it take to print that little notice on your whole lot of papers?' He said maybe half a dozen. 'Well, then,' I said, 'that entitles you to bring your wife and four of the children. So run it in and come on Wednesday. You'll get a lot of fun out of it, anyway.' I knew he was always looking for fun, so that hit him right. And he not only put in the notice, but he called attention to it at the head of every column of news in the paper, and then brought all six children to even up the extra ink and paper.

"Then, besides, Mark Williams went down and had a lot of 'dodgers,' he called them, printed, and sent boys all over town with them. They read, 'Surprise Party To-night. Everybody Come. Rev. Simms and family at Mrs. Bell's.'

"The day was mighty nice and cool, or I'd never have got things ready. I got Mary Parker and 'John Maree' and three or four other girls to help, but I didn't let them into the secret until it didn't matter if things did get out, and they, with the help

of the boys they brought along, decorated the yard and porch with Japanese lanterns and flags till it looked mighty pretty. Had a row of lights all the way down the maple walk to the gate, and it was just as bright for quite a ways around the front steps.

"At last they began to come, old and young, some on foot, lots in buggies, till the fence was thick with them clear around the block, some alone, and others in bunches of from three to twenty. Old men hobbling in on their canes to give their pound, whole Sunday-school classes of children each bringing his pound, girls and boys in couples or crowds, all filing up on to the porch to pile the pounds on the long kitchen table spread to receive them. Then they scattered, and 'John Maree' and Frankie kept them amused with games till everybody had come, though lots of them loafed around the porch, and watched the folks coming to see what they brought.

"And the things they did bring! There was a row of bigger, substantial things around the outside of the table that held the little things in. That was made of three sacks of flour from some of the grocers, and a ham and a sack of meal, and a firkin of butter right off the ice, and a bolt of muslin, and a nice round cheese that looked so good.

"Now, if it had been an ordinary pound social,

that cheese and that ham would have been cut and mostly gone that evening, but we'd advertised this as an extraordinary one, and we meant to keep it so. Inside the rim were piled boxes of starch, both corn and laundry, and pounds of tea and coffee, and bars of soap, and strings of dried apple and pumpkin, and boxes of cocoa, and bags of dried corn, and popcorn, and links of Bologna sausage (I never could make a list of them, for I can't spell half of them), and boxes of prepared cereals, and boxes of letter-paper, and bottles of olives, and pickles, and I can't name them all, but anyway, a table piled high.

"Mark Williams, and the editor, and Mr. and Mrs. Simms, with the youngest babies, sat up on the porch, and shook hands with everybody as they left the table after putting down their contribution. Once when I stopped to speak to Mark, for I was flying around seeing that everybody was amused, and having a good time, I heard little Iola Simms, she's four, and a dear child, but awfully shy, say to her mother, 'Mamma, evrybody bringed somepin but us folks. Why didn't us folks bring somepin? I'd give up the new dress I'm going to have some day, to bring somepin, mamma—' Her mother tried to hush her, but just Mark and I heard her, and then when her mother told her that they didn't

bring anything because the others were all bringing for 'Iola and papa and mamma and brothers and sisters,' it was worth all the work and worry ten thousand times over just to see her sit up on her mother's lap and beam on everybody, and look the pretty child she really is, and not the tired, worn, frail little midget she usually appears, tired with caring for her little brother while the older children are in school, and her mother busy around the house, for the baby is teething, and little four-year-old finds it no easy task to keep him amused.

"They came so early, and so thick and fast while they were coming, that it wasn't much after eight when the rush was over, and only an odd one or two hurried up the maple walk. Among these late comers every one was so surprised that they could hardly speak to see coming up the steps the tall, spare figure of the Catholic priest, a quiet, hard-working man, with only a handful in his church, but so attentive to these that they look on him almost as one of the saints. Hardly looking to right or to left, he walked up the steps, and laid his little package on the pile, then walked across the porch to where Mrs. Simms and little Iola sat. With only a bow to the father and mother, he laid a beautiful doll on Iola's lap, with the words, 'For a sister who cares for her brother, from one who is trying

to care for his brothers.' Then he turned and walked away. Iola looked at the doll, then slid down from her mother's lap and started after him.

"He was going down the steps when she called him, and he turned and his face brightened, and I never saw a man look more holy, more saint-like, than he did as he stood there, with hat removed and the lights shining on his face, as the child held up her hands to him. Then he dropped to his knees on the topmost step and the little girl leaned forward and kissed him. She held up her doll then for him to kiss, and a queer half-smile crept over his face as he took the doll, kissed it gently, handed it back to Iola, then rose and walked down the steps, and out through the crowd.

"He was hardly out at the gate when up from the street came a noise as if Bedlam had broken loose, and up the walk came a procession of young men, each with two sticks of cord-wood on his shoulders, and all singing at the top of their lungs:

"'Here come the boys,
List to their noise,
What do they care if they only have fun?
Nothing they know
Of grief or woe,
And may they never till their race is run!'

"From the various tunes, it sounded as if they were making it up as they went along, but they kept step all the way up the walk, and up the steps to the table, where they carefully laid each stick under the table till they had just fifty sticks, maybe half a cord, of as nice maple wood as you could wish to see. Then their leader led them over to shake hands down the line, and introduced each one gravely to Mark who sat at the head and had been smiling oddly ever since they came in sight. It was the whole college delegation from the town, home for the summer, and all rigged out in white duck trousers and blue serge coats, and the way they did liven up things was something wonderful, but that was after they had been passed down the line, each even being introduced to Iola's doll and to me, where I stood at Mrs. Simms's left to kind of support her, and keep her from wiping her eyes publicly, even though the tears half-blinded her, and ran down her nose.

"As soon as everybody had come I called out my Sunday-school class, boys of about fifteen or so, and they began to carry the stuff off the table back into the house and through into the kitchen. As soon as the table was cleared and the wood-pile taken away, the class of girls about the same age came out the door and put down on the table three great,

big dish-pans full of red raspberries, and three freezers of ice-cream were brought out by the boys, and cake, and dishes, and spoons, and in about five minutes that whole yard-full of people were busy, and keeping those two classes of young folks busy waiting on them.

"While this was going on, I, with about a dozen other girls I could depend on not to be thinking about their beaux too much, skipped back into the kitchen and went to work. By the time the eating part was done, and the dishes brought back, we were ready, and when the two classes cleared off the table, and carried the remains of the eatables back to the kitchen, they brought out the greatest quantity of the oddest-looking bundles you ever see. These they piled high on the table.

"Mark Williams then wheeled over beside the table and began talking. The crowd had all gathered up close around the steps and on the porch by this time, so everybody could hear.

"'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began, 'you all know me, don't you? And you've known me a long time, haven't you? And there aren't many among you who would care to see me hurt, are there? Thank you. Now it's easier. Well, I'm going to try something this evening that I've never

tried before, and it'll hurt me pretty bad if I don't succeed. Now, will you all help me?'

"Everybody yelled, 'Yes,' and 'Sure thing,' and one little shaver in the top of my pet lilac-bush (but of course I couldn't say anything) hollered out, 'You bet your neck.'

"'Now, then,' Mark went on, 'we advertised a "Pound Social Extraordinary," and a "Surprise Party." Perhaps you think you've had enough extraordinary and surprising in the refreshments, but that is not the extraordinary part. Listen just one more minute and I'll tell you the surprise. Now, you all know that the usual Pound Social is held at the preacher's house, and everybody takes a pound, more or less, of something useful, more or less, and then everybody falls to and eats up or scatters 'round the house what has been brought. Now our hostess, whom we all have to thank for the new feature, has often commented on the old form of social, and decided to give us a newer, more up-to-date, and more profitable social. The new feature is this. Each of you brought something. Not everything lends itself to pound division. I am glad to see that many of the friends realized this. Others, however, stuck to the pound limit, and their gifts were just as acceptable as any others. But among such a mass of gifts there must neces-

sarily have been a great deal of duplication, a great many things that will not keep, and since, as Mr. Simms informs me, he does not expect to return next year, many things that they cannot use in the short time they have yet to stay here. These superfluous articles, selected by a careful committee of the ladies, will now be put up at auction, and the proceeds be turned over to Mr. Simms in addition to the wagon-load of stuff that stands at the door to be sent up to-morrow morning. This, then, is the thing you have bound yourselves to, to help me make a success of this auction. Will you stick to your promise?' There weren't quite so many 'yesses,' this time, but he knew they would, so he picked up the first package.

"'You know as well as I what this contains, but it's a pound of something, which must be good, since it was thought good enough to give to the preacher. But that same committee of ladies has kindly disguised this so we wouldn't bid too extravagantly.' We had done just that. We'd made big bundles of little things and put things in other things' familiar wrappers and mixed them up generally.

"The boy in the lilac yelled 'Five cents,' and one of the girls said, 'Seven.' Mark wouldn't start out waiting for bids, so he closed it off when a lull came

at nineteen cents. My class were the messengers, and delivered the packages, and collected the cash, while Mark acted as cashier in addition to his other duty, and the editor recorded the sales and purchasers. Every one shouted, 'Open it,' when that first package was received, and the boy who got it showed up two cakes of toilet soap, which one of the girls near him immediately bought from him for a quarter. There had been about twenty-five bars of Ivory soap on the table, so that toilet soap could be spared.

"Another box was started. One of the college boys bid, and then the bidding was lively, for they got reckless, and kept bidding against each other and against themselves, till they ran the price up to a dollar and ninety-five cents. That turned out to be a box of candy. That was a part of the surprise, too, and we'd put in a lot of home-made candy the girls had made that afternoon. It was fine candy, too, and that made the next thing go well. That was one of the pounds of tea, but it sold for a dollar and a quarter, and the young man wanted to give it back but we wouldn't take it, so he gave it to the Poor Commissioner, who was there. Next a great big box was put up, but that went for twenty-nine cents to a boy in my class, and that turned out to have a two-pound box of candy inside. This

started the bidding again, and what with three dollars for a box of starch, and nineteen cents for two boxes of cereals (they got twenty-nine boxes just of one kind), the fun was lively.

"At last some of the boys got to bidding in each other's names, but Mark's sharp eyes soon spotted that, and it stopped right away. One boy that tried that called out for one package, 'Charlie Oates bids forty cents.' Charlie called out, 'No, he don't,' but he was in the front of the crowd, and Mark saw him, so he went on, 'he bids sixty,' and the crowd yelled. One old man called out, 'Mark, I want to bid, but I haven't any money with me.' 'All right,' says Mark, 'I'll take it out of your pension check when that comes, or you can give a note. Here's a blank. The bank will collect these free. Mr. Secretary, fill out a note for the gentleman. One bundle, eighty-nine cents. Of what? Oh, yes, one bottle pain-killer, worth at least a dollar. Keep on bidding, neighbours.'

"And so the fun went on, everybody laughing and bidding, some bidding just to make others bid up, and then getting caught themselves, and all just having the best kind of a time, and the money kept rolling in.

"At last every bundle was gone and there was a good pile of money on the table. 'Now,' said Mark,

'there's just one thing more to be sold. No, it isn't here, but it ought to bring the record price of the evening. That thing is the half-cord of wood the young men so generously stole from back of the bank, and presented to the preacher.' Everybody yelled at this, and none more so than the young men. 'Of course it's understood that the sale must be to the boys themselves, but you are all at liberty to bid against them. What am I offered now for a half-cord best maple wood, full length, straight and nice? Who'll bid?'

"One of the girls bid 'Two dollars.' A man raised it to 'Three,' and then the girls took it up and in a minute ran it up to eleven dollars. The boys began to look anxious, and three or four of them got to talking together. Then one stepped out and said, 'Mr. Williams, we're afraid of the way these girls are running it up. If you'll take a dollar apiece from us, there's twenty-five —' 'Twenty-six,' puts in Frankie. 'If I hadn't been busy, I'd have been with you, too. So I ought to pay my share.' 'Well,' went on the spokesman, 'if you'll take a dollar apiece, we'll be glad to settle at that. You certainly have got us foul, so if that's satisfactory, we'll gladly settle.' 'I'll have to leave it to the crowd,' said Mark. 'You have heard the proposition to settle the case by paying twenty-six dollars for a

half-cord of nice maple wood. Shall we accept?' As the fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters of these young men were in the crowd it seemed quite the opinion that they might as well be allowed to settle, and after a few minutes' ransacking pockets, and appeals to 'Dad,' and 'Uncle Bill,' and 'Cousin John,' the twenty-six dollars was added to the pile which Mark was busily counting on the table.

"The editor was adding up, and in a few minutes they announced the total of eighty-seven dollars and eighteen cents, besides, said Mark, 'three sacks of flour, sugar, meal, potatoes, starch, soap, beans, meat, muslin, gingham, flannel, altogether a wagon-load of things enough to keep a hotel running for three months, to say nothing of half a cord of nice maple wood, as high-priced wood as was ever sold in this city, wood, which, strange to say, already belonged to the preacher, and which I had had delivered at the bank to be sawed by the machine before it was delivered at the house.

"'Now, I know Brother Simms has something to say, but I know he's not in condition to say it because I've heard him snuffling all evening, so we'll have that singing by Mark Williams as announced, and he'll join you, and we'll be dismissed by all singing, "God Be with You Till We Meet Again."'"

CHAPTER XIII.

CLEARING UP

"THE next morning after the social at our house, half a dozen of the girls and boys came over to help clear up. Besides Frankie, there was Len Hilton, and Billy Brooks, and two or three more you don't know, and Mary Parker, and 'John Maree,' and Pearl Rhodes, but he's a boy though he has a girl's name. The boys at college tell about his getting out of drill the first six months he was there. You know they have to drill with guns and such, like the militia, and the first week all the boys' names was posted where they could see them, and Pearl's name wasn't among them, because they thought from the name he was a girl, so he didn't drill till some one of the professors saw him out walking when the freshmen were all drilling, and reported him, and then Pearl told how it happened. Well, they've changed the rule now, so that they see each one, and every boy has to drill, no matter what his name is.

"By and by we got all cleared up. Jim with the wagon had taken the stuff, wood and all, to the preacher's the night before, and taken my class of boys along to unload it, but there were the lanterns to take down, and the wires, and all those dishes to be washed. We hadn't touched a one the night before, and I wanted them to go back to the church where I'd borrowed them good and clean.

"Frankie and two of the girls worked on the lanterns. He'd unhook them and the girls would shut them up and take out the bits of candle. Another boy and girl went to work scrubbing the porch, for there was raspberries, and cream, and dust, and chips, till it was a sight. We knew they'd offered just to keep away from the rest of us, so Mary and 'John Maree' and Pearl Rhodes and Billy Brooks started in washing dishes. I laughed till my sides ached at their nonsense, for Pearl was a regular joker that would keep a body laughing till he couldn't stand up.

"Right in the middle of the dish-washing he had to pretend he saw a mouse, and with his big apron gathered up as if it was a skirt, he jumped clear up on the kitchen table, while the girls all screamed and jumped up on chairs, only Mary had chosen a rocking-chair by mistake, and went over in a heap, with the water-pail she pulled down off the corner shelf

on top of her. As it happened, it had just been emptied, but by the time we had found out if she was hurt, which she wasn't a bit, we was all laughing so that the others had all come in from outside and were wanting to know what was up. It took us half an hour to get quieted down, and then we fell to and just hustled through those dishes, and got them into the baskets all ready for Jim to take them back.

"The young folks all went home then but Mary, who was going to stay to dinner, or what Frankie calls 'lunch,' since he's been away to school, though I tell him if he calls that a 'lunch,' I'd hate to see him eat a 'dinner.'

"It was about eleven when they got away, and I said, 'Mary, let's go down and ask how Ben is. You haven't seen him yet. Maybe they'll let you see him. And I want to talk over last night with Mark.'

"We started out slow, for it was getting hot again after the cool day before, and kept on the shady sides of the streets all the way. We just got to the corner when we met Doctor Jefferson coming out of Mark's. I saw he looked worried, and I stopped him to ask about Ben.

"'Mrs. Bell,' he says, 'Ben's all right. He's able to sit up, but Mark's down with typhoid.

Housekeeper or nurse not careful enough, and now he's down. I suppose it's the milk — ' 'Milk,' I said, 'why, he keeps his own cow.' 'That's what's the matter. There wouldn't have been half the danger if the milk came from anywhere else than this house.' 'Can Ben be moved?' I asked. Mary looked at me kind of thankful.

"'No,' he says, 'not now, but we'll have another nurse here to-morrow, and I'll pull Mark Williams through if man can do it. But can't you stay till the other nurse comes? The first one is all worn out with Ben's care, and the housekeeper has all she can do getting meals, and answering the calls. I've unscrewed the bell, and put up a sign, "Go to the side door." There have been eighteen there this morning. They heard about it when she sent the chore-boy down after me. I'm afraid it will go hard with Mark, he's so pulled down looking after Ben. A man in his condition had no business doing charity nursing. Yes,' turning to Mary, 'that's what it is, and if Mark Williams dies, it will be all on the shoulders of your mother — ' Mary was half-crying and clinging to the fence by this time, and the sight of her suffering made me mad.

"'See here, Doc Jefferson,' I said, 'don't say anything more like that. I know the Bible says the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the

children to the fourth generation, but it doesn't say you're to do the visitin', and I just guess if anything happens to Mark Williams, it will be just as much my fault for not taking Ben in, and Mark's fault for not taking care of himself someway, and the nurse's fault for not doing something she ought to have done, and the housekeeper's fault for not keeping things so they couldn't get germs and things in them, and your fault for going all to pieces here before folks, and losing your nerve just because Mark is sick, Mark, who made a man of you by keeping you from drinking yourself to death, as it will be the fault of that poor mother who, I'll bet, hasn't slept one night through while her son has been lying here sick. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it, and then go home, and get some rest, and — don't — you — go — near — a — whiskey — bottle — as — long — as — Mark is — sick — or — I'll — turn — you — out — of — the — house — myself — and — get — a — doctor that — can — be — depended — on — and — the — people — will — all — stand — by — me. Now! ! !' And he slunk away as if I'd hit him with a whip, but I called him back to tell him to telegraph for a nurse just as soon as he could, and to get the best.

"I had pitied that man when I first knew him,

and I had grown to like him, for he was a good doctor, and a great hand with children, but when I saw him give way as he had, just because the man he most cared for, the man who had made him the best doctor in the town, the man who had held him back from a drunkard's grave for ten years, just because that man was sick, I lost my faith in him. Still, I knew if he kept from the whiskey he'd keep all right, and I knew he couldn't fool me about that when he came to the house next time, and I meant to be there once a day to smell his breath and look at his eyes.

"I told him as I let him go, I'd be down right away, and hurried home, Mary with me, to get into something more suitable for nursing than the dress I had on, and to get a little satchel of things I might need if I happened to have to stay. Mary was to stay and get dinner and tell Jim and Frankie about Mark and where I was.

"On the way home Mary said to me, 'Mrs. Bell, will everybody feel like that toward mother? Do they feel that way?' I knew they didn't all, only about nine-tenths of them did, but I said, 'Why, no, child, they don't wonder much, for you know he ran away from home.' 'Yes, I know, but don't they say she drove him away? She thinks they do.' I wanted to say, 'And the truth hurts, doesn't

it?' but I wouldn't hurt her, so I said, 'Mary, don't worry one bit about what the doctor said. He was just all tired out. Been up all night, I guess, with some sick baby, and then was called right to Mark's before breakfast, and I'll bet he hasn't had any yet. That housekeeper wouldn't think of it. Now what is worrying me, Mary, is how are you and Frank Brown getting along? Is your engagement still broken off? And is it going to stay that way?'

"'Do you know, Mrs. Bell,' she said, 'I was hoping to have a good long talk with you about that. Frank says it isn't and mother said it was. And she doesn't know I've seen him since the day Ben came home, so she still thinks it is broken. But I won't marry anybody else, now. And I know Frank won't have anybody but me. So I guess we are engaged.'

"'Well,' said I, 'stay that way. That's what's right. But don't stir up your mother about it. What has she said since the night of the quilting?' 'She's waiting till Ben gets well to know what that telegram means. She thinks yet maybe he has some money. She won't give up.' 'But,' I said, 'Mark says he lost it all in Chicago, but, of course, you can't always tell from a man's ravings. But you can sort of pick out things he says over and

over. And the money affair seems straight enough. But are you and Frank going to keep on seeing each other on the sly, and writing under other names, and that sort of thing? It isn't fair to each other. Why don't he go straight to your mother and tell her he's going to marry you and he is going to have her consent? Or does he want you to run away with him?' 'No, oh, no, he said when we first became engaged last year, that he didn't believe in secret or runaway marriages. It looked as if the one that proposed it was ashamed of the other one, or afraid to take the consequences of getting married. That if he was ever married it would be in our parlour at home, for, since he isn't a church-member, he didn't want to be married in church.'

"'Good for him!' I said. 'When you see him tell him I want to have a talk with him. Now, Mary, will you marry without your mother's consent? You're twenty-two, aren't you?' 'Mrs. Bell,' she said, 'do you think any girl has the right to? Do you think it's fair to herself? Is it fair to the man she loves?'

"'Mary,' I said, 'I don't like to commit myself, but if you had your mother's consent once and nothing happened to make you change your mind, nor anything that had any right to make her change hers, and if your father consents, not in words, but

in actions, you know, as men show their feelings so often, why, then — if I loved him enough to trust him, and he loved me enough to — well, to refuse to marry me except at home, why, I — believe — I'd — marry — him.'

"'But, Mrs. Bell, if mother won't consent and he won't marry me except at home, what are we to do?' And I shook my head, for it certainly looked like a puzzle.

"By the time we got done talking, I had been home some time, and had a satchel packed with things I might need. Frankie came in then, and Mary and I got things on to the table for his and his pa's dinner, and then she and I started for Mark's home again. We hadn't got to the place in the morning, you remember, so I didn't know just how Ben was, but the housekeeper who let us in said he was so much better that the doctor had said the day before he might see his folks if any of them came. He'd been gaining so fast ever since the Fourth. Seemed like that day had just started him on his feet almost.

"I smiled to myself, and asked how Mark was. She said he was pretty bad. They'd had his bed in the sitting-room and Ben had been in Mark's bedroom, but now Ben was so much better that they'd moved him into the parlour bedroom and Mark

still was in the sitting-room. Mark was taken just as they were getting ready to disinfect the room where Ben had been, so he couldn't be put in there. He was sleeping now, but if we wanted to go in and see Ben, we could. She'd just been in, so she knew he was all right, and we could go right in.

"I wanted to hear more about Mark, so I sent Mary in, and when I got in there after awhile, Ben was looking just as peart and chipper as could be, and he was real good-looking, too, with his big, bushy beard, and his nice eyes, and soft, fuzzy hair. He put out his hand when Mary introduced us, and took mine, and pulled me down so he could whisper to me. All he said was, 'Thanks for your good advice to Margie. Yes, she told me.' Then I thought he was tired enough, so I sent Mary home and went out to see if Mark needed anything."

CHAPTER XIV.

BEN PARKER

"MARK was still sleeping, so the housekeeper and I had dinner, and she told me all about how he'd been, and what the doctor said. The nurse had stayed up till after the doctor came, and then had gone to bed to rest for the night. Mrs. Bright, the housekeeper, said the nurse was all right. Knew her business, and kept as spick and span as anybody could, but she was pretty well tired out with caring for Ben.

"After dinner I fixed up Ben's dinner for him, and made it as tasty-looking as I could. I knew Margaret Lee always liked flowers, and thought maybe he did, so I put two or three of Mark's nicest roses in a vase, and took that up on the tray.

"After he had finished eating he seemed as fresh and ready to talk as if he hadn't talked so long with Mary in the morning. He lay looking at the flowers a while, and then he turned to me right quick, and said, 'Mrs. Bell, why did you tell Margie

Lee to come to me?' 'Why,' I asked, 'wasn't it the right thing to do? Didn't you like it?' 'Like it! Like it! Well, if a man who has been lost for days in a desert suddenly catches sight of the trees that show where water is, does he like it? She'd never have come to me if it hadn't been for you. I never knew she cared. Did she act as if she cared when I called to see her at New Berlin, and she sent me away? Did she —'

"'Stop!' I said. 'Now stop and think what you are saying. Did you act as if you cared for her, for her feelings and her reputation, or as if you cared for anything but yourself and your own silly pride, when you came to town with a circus, and with the dirt of travel still on you went to a respectable home and sent in word to the girl you say you loved, that you were the man she was going to marry? Can you blame her for sending you away?

"'But she does care,' I went on, 'and you know now that she cares. But caring isn't everything. It's the keeping on caring, and not only keeping on caring, but caring more and more with every breath she draws. And it's for you now to make her do that. She has confessed that she cares for you. Have you ever confessed to any one in words or actions that you loved her? Not that she ever heard

of. Only "You're the girl I'm going to marry when I have as much money as you have." Do you suppose she cares how much money you have? Do you suppose any woman that is a woman cares? If it's you she really loves she would marry you if you hadn't a cent. But let me tell you. A woman has to be wooed before she's wed. And do you think you've wooed her? Do you think the knock-down-and-drag-out wooing of the savages is still the thing? Anybody would think you did.

"'Yes, I will give you a chance to say "a thing" when I'm through. I haven't a great deal to say to you, but what I have I'm going to say even if you are too sick and tired to listen. Now I'll begin at the beginning. Do you love Margaret Lee?' 'I do.' 'Do you love Margaret Lee more than you love your own pride?' 'I love her more than anything.' 'Have you ever told her so?' 'N-no.' 'Why not?' 'I didn't think I had any right until I had something to offer her.' 'But you have something to offer her.' 'What? I'd like to know.' 'You said you loved her.' 'But that's not enough. I can't —' 'Love *is* enough. Offer her that, and then it will be time enough to think of what more you can offer. Did you wait till you had more to offer before you loved her? Why, no, you loved her from the first. Then why didn't you tell her?

What did she care about the money you were going to get, until she had the right to care, until you had given her the right to care by offering what you had to give?

"'You may think now that you know she cares, that you've won her, but I fear you are pretty much mistaken. Your hardest time is coming right now. The time when she knows you care, and when you know she cares, but when you don't know how much. When did you make that vow you are so proud of? That "I'll marry you," and so forth? And just what was it you said?'

"'I'll marry Margaret Lee when I have as much money as she has. I made that when I was just a little fellow.' 'Well, between you and me, Ben,' I said, 'I don't think when you made that that you were old enough to make a contract like that, so I guess you'd be let out of that if it came up in court. But, if you still want to marry her, I'd advise you to get right down to business and try to win her. She has given up her pride, and shown that she cares for you, by coming here to ask about you, and to ask to see you. Now it's up to you to forget that silly vow and to put your pride in your pocket, or keep it out of sight someway, and go down on your knees to her. Pride, like temper, is a mighty good servant, but a mighty hard master

to serve, as I guess you've found out these last ten years. And a man that's in love, that's wooing and has hopes of winning, has to have both pride and temper pretty well in hand. I'll give you fair warning. If she's the woman I think she is, she'll make you crawl in the dust. For all those years that you've kept your love from her, for every one of those, you'll pay double and treble, and yet, if you're the right one, and can make her sure of that, you won't mind it, and when she does stoop and raise you from the dust where she made you crawl, she'll be so pitiful of you and your dusty condition that she'll raise you to the seventh heaven. But you can expect to have spells, and pretty severe spells of stormy weather when she remembers what you, from your silly pride, made her suffer.

"'For she has suffered. Any woman would suffer, and she especially, at the thought of a man, the man that she really cares for, wandering up and down the earth, unheard of for years, muttering to himself as he fights for his bread, and what little else he gets, "I'll marry her when I get as much money as she has." And if she makes you suffer, remember what she gives up when she does finally give up. Family, friends, independence, and home, and for what? To follow you wherever you go, to make your friends her friends, to make your life her

life, to make you her constant thought, her one care, her all in all. And what do you give up? Your wandering life, with no one to care for you in sickness, your independence in part, your boarding-house, with its ill-cooked meals, your hall-bedroom, with its scanty room, and for what? For comfort and happiness, your own fireside, *your own home.*

"'Can you wonder, then, if the woman hesitates? Can you wonder, even, if she refuses the love you offer? But, Ben, I believe your pride, that same pride that has made you both suffer, will come to your aid, and will make you both happy. If she cares for you, and I believe she does, if you care for her, and I believe you do, she will give up as she gave up her pride, you will put away your pride, and together you will be just as happy as you both deserve.'

"I knew I ought to go then, for I'd said enough for the time, so I went out, and didn't go in again till I had his supper ready. Then he was ready to talk again, and I let him tell about his travels since he'd left home. His travels with the show all over the country, then sickness, and loss of his job, life on a coasting schooner, seal-fishing, salmon-fishing, lumbering, and, at last, the grand rush to the Klondike, and the suffering there. From that he had come out better than from any of the

others, returning to Seattle with about three thousand dollars in gold-dust and nuggets. These he had changed for bills, only to be drugged and robbed when he landed in Chicago, already sick and partly out of his head.

"But he had friends who would set him on his feet, friends in the Klondike, at Skagway, and some in Seattle, though they were away when he was there, and they were men he could depend upon. There was his claim, too, at Dawson City, where his partners were counting on his coming back. If he didn't, they'd buy him out for a couple of thousand, so he had something to start with.

"When he was pretty well through his yarn, I thought I'd give him something to think about, so I said, as I left him, 'Ben Parker, if I was in your place, I'd write to those partners as soon as I was able to write, and sell out, and I'd write to my friends in Seattle, or wherever I had any I could depend on, and I'd get a job where I could take a wife, and I wouldn't go back till I had the wife to take back there.' But he said, 'Why, I can't marry, and I won't—' 'Don't say that,' I broke in, 'don't say another word about not marrying till you have as much as Margaret Lee. That's just the foolish pride of yours that you're

going to get control of some day.' But as I went out the door he had his lips shut tight, and, though his eyes was smiling, he shook his head just as slow and solemn."

CHAPTER XV.

MARK'S ILLNESS

"By the time I got done with Ben's dishes, the nurse was up and ready for the night's work. I asked her how soon Ben could be moved, intending to have him taken over to our house, but she told me that Mark had said, when she first came, that he didn't want Ben to think of leaving there till he was thoroughly strong and well, and the doctor, she knew, wouldn't go against Mark's wishes.

"Mark, she said, was easier, though the fever was still high. The other nurse wouldn't get there, if she came promptly, till the next night, so if I could, she wanted me to come over in the morning to look after both during the day. The housekeeper couldn't be depended on for that, because she didn't have any confidence in herself, and of course that makes a heap of difference. If you don't think you can do a thing, nine times out of ten you can't. And if you do manage to do it, it's a mistake, and you think everybody knows it. I tell you, Katie,

it pays to have confidence in your own ability. Get a notion into your head that you can do things, then go ahead and try, and first thing you know, it's done. Success in this world is a pretty good even mixture of confidence and hustle, and those two in about the same proportions make what's called 'luck.' As one of my old neighbours used to say, that had a knack for remembering rhymes:

> "'It is not wealth, nor church, nor state,
> But git-up-and-git that makes men great.'

"If I'm a good nurse, and folks do say I am, it isn't so much because I know how, as it is that I'm not afraid to try to care for the sick, and I try to do what I'm told to do with a good deal of common sense mixed in. And if the patient gets worse, I don't get scared half to death and run for the neighbours. But that's what Mrs. Bright did. I guess it's safe to say she only married into the Bright family. And yet, she's a good housekeeper. That is, she makes it seem as much like a home as any old bachelor's house ever does, and keeps things clean and neat.

"I went home and got supper for Jim and Frankie, and told them they'd better come out here to the farm the next day, for I'd be away all day, and they wouldn't get much to eat. Then, too, I

wanted to hear how you all were getting along. Hadn't heard from you for three days. The next morning I got breakfast early, and put some knitting in my bag, for I always like to have something for my fingers to keep pace with my tongue, and got over to Mark's about seven. That would let the nurse get a good rest early, for she would have to be up all that night and the next day, too, since, as soon as the new nurse came they were going to change off, the new one taking the night work, and Miss Lane the day. I guess the new one had been resting up for a week or two.

"The nurse said Mark hadn't had an easy night at all, was delirious most of the time. She told me about what to do till the doctor came, and about taking temperatures when he was himself, and about his medicines, and I put down all the directions. I can always remember, but I was afraid I'd get like Doc Jefferson if Mark got worse, and lose my nerve, thinking about how we'd have to get along without him.

"He was all right when I went in, and knew me, and smiled at me, and tried to say something. I leaned over, for he couldn't talk very loud, and he said, 'Tell Monroe' (he was assistant superintendent of the Sunday school) 'to go on and have the picnic next Wednesday just the same whether I'm

there or not. Even if I'm worse, I don't want the children disappointed.' I nodded, and put my fingers on my lips to show he mustn't talk any more, and then went around and freshened up things a bit. I was mighty glad then for his sake that he lived in a brick house, for it was so much cooler and easier to keep cool than if it had been frame. The day before it had begun to get pretty warm, and the nurse had set Mrs. Bright to hanging sheets wrung out of cold water in front of the windows so that what air came in was cool, and the room was darkened, of course, so it was pretty comfortable.

"I sat down after things were picked up and took up my knitting. I had my big wooden needles, so there wasn't any noise, and pretty soon Mark dozed off. I must have sat there an hour at work when suddenly he began talking away just as if he were talking in his sleep. Then it grew clearer, and I heard names, 'Ben Parker,' and 'Margaret Lee,' and then another name, 'Polly Hawkins,' and, 'Why didn't you make me give up? She says she'll make him give up his pride. Why didn't you make me give up mine? I've needed you so. I've needed you so.' Then he ran off into something I couldn't make out, but all that day till the doctor came, and after he left, he kept on talking to

himself. It didn't sound like raving. It was just that talking in the sleep sound.

"The doctor I could see was a different man from what he was the day before when I met him. He told me what to do, said the new nurse would be there that night, he hoped, ready to go to work the next night, and then, as he went out on the porch, he turned to me and said, 'Mrs. Bell, I want to thank you for calling me down as you did yesterday. I had lost my nerve completely, and you made me just mad enough so it came back, and with it my confidence. I'm sure now, with the aid of these nurses and you, that I'm going to pull him through, for he has a wonderfully strong constitution in spite of that paralysis of his limbs. Of course, he's worn some with nursing Ben Parker, but I don't think it's at all a serious case. The raving doesn't mean anything. It goes with the disease. Of course I needn't say anything to you about speaking of what he says in his raving to any one.' And I said pretty sharp, 'No, you needn't,' and he see he'd said quite enough.

"All afternoon, every now and then, Mark's ravings would go back to Polly, and I never heard any one speak before so it touched me as that did. Poor, weak cripple, he yet had been strong enough to put aside his only chance for happiness, and now

in the grip of the fever, he was vainly trying to call it back. I listened as long as I could stand it, and then I went outside. But when I came back he was still calling for 'Polly,' always for 'Polly.' Then he'd change and say, 'Ben Parker and Margaret Lee, lovers,' then, 'Mark Williams and Polly Hawkins, lovers. No, no, for Mark drove Love away. Don't you remember when Love came? Mark was sitting on the porch in his new wheel-chair, pretty wheel-chair, such a pretty wheel-chair, and Love came, and Love saw not the wheel-chair, saw not the crippled Mark, saw only the Mark that Love had created, but Mark drove Love out, or did the wheel-chair, the pretty wheel-chair? Mark did it, he did it. Love could have taken both, but Mark drove her out, Mark drove her out,' and so on for an hour or more.

"I knew when he had told me of Polly, that he felt that perhaps it had not been best, after all, but I never thought he felt it so deeply after all these years. And yet I could understand, when Margaret Lee came to see Ben in his sickness, how it brought back to Mark the whole scene in his own life where the woman had come to the side of the man when most he needed her, and had been driven away, driven away.

"When the nurse came down, I asked her if he

had raved any the night before, and she said he had, mostly unintelligibly, but parts very much what I had heard that day. There wasn't anything I could do, but on the way home I thought of something I could do, and something I made up my mind to do if that raving kept on. I thought of it half the night, and I waked up in the morning thinking of it, and when I went down to Mark's early that morning, and the nurse told me he still kept that up, I made up my mind to carry out the plan.

"Before I was home again I made up my mind that it was none of my affairs, and I wouldn't. Before I had the breakfast dishes done I was determined I would. By the time the housework was done I was sure I wouldn't, and it went on that way till I got my baking done, that being Saturday. Then I put on my bonnet and started down-town to see Monroe about the Sunday-school picnic. When I got to the gate I thought, 'Well, if I don't do it now I can't do it till Monday.' So I marched back into the house, planted myself at Jim's desk, and wrote a letter to Polly Hawkins. You may well look surprised, for I was just as surprised when I finally got it done. Then before I could change my mind again I went down and mailed it.

"This is what I wrote. I never was any good

at writing letters, but I wrote what I felt, and I thought she'd understand if she was the understanding kind, and just get mad if she was the other kind, and getting mad at me wouldn't hurt me any and wouldn't do her much good, since she never saw me, and probably never would. The letter read just this way:

"'DEAR MISS POLLY: — I hear that you are still Miss Polly, and Mark Williams is just plain Bachelor Mark, just as good and kind and lovable as ever, but flat on his back with typhoid fever now, and calling for "Polly," his "Polly" that he drove away, until it fairly makes me sick. Now if you care for him as he most certainly cares for you, I think it no harm to call your attention to the fact that the fare here is only about two dollars and a half, and that trains run twice a day. I have three spare beds, so you won't have to go to a hotel.

Yours for Mark's happiness,

MRS. BETSEY BELL.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL PICNIC

"Now, Katie, do I look so very old? Well, neither do I feel old. If I was old I wouldn't be able to go through with what I had to go through yesterday, and then ride out here to-day. But I did live through it and am able to tell about it. But what made me ask if I looked old was something I heard a woman say yesterday. You'll hear that when I get to it.

"You know, as I told you Monday, when I was out here, that last Sunday they announced that the Sunday-school picnic would be held at Hart's big spring, four miles southeast of town, on Wednesday. Of course, Jim and Frankie and I expected to go, and take the big carriage, only probably Frankie would go in one of the 'busses with the rest of his crowd, but late Tuesday night Jim got word of a funeral of a man that used to live near neighbour to him here on the farm, yes, Leighton was the name, and he thought he ought to go to

that on Wednesday, so I said I'd go in the 'bus with my class of boys. I knew they'd be delighted. Jim said he'd take me to the picnic, since the funeral wasn't till afternoon, but I said I'd just as soon go the other way, and he wouldn't have that long, hot drive in the morning and another in the afternoon.

"He hitched up, though, yesterday morning, and drove us down to the church at about half-past eight. They were beginning to gather then from all directions. Two or three youngsters at a time, with a big basket between them, would come staggering up the long walk to the church. It was cool and shady there under the maples and elms, and I wasn't in any hurry to start out in the hot sun for that four-mile drive. Every now and then a bunch of girls would drift down the walk, find some one of their class hadn't come yet, and would start off to hurry her up. The small boys were busy with 'Hide-and-coop,' and 'Cross-tag,' only they'd all drop their games about once in so often to holler, 'Here come the 'busses,' and the little girls would grab their baskets, and their still littler sisters, and gather down on the sidewalk only to hear the boys yell, 'Rubber,' as they stared down the street for the 'busses which didn't come.

"At last they did come, and my class of boys,

who, at the first sight of the teams, had raced down to the corner of the block in order to take possession of the most comfortable 'bus, loaded me and half the baskets of the whole party into the big 'bus, much to the dismay of the little girls who were torn so roughly from their much cherished dinners. Finally, every little girl and every little sister and brother, and every small boy, was crowded into the big 'busses, with a judicious scattering of teachers to keep the uproar down a little, and we drove off.

"First a load of steady-goers, the ones that always go to picnics, and always take the same things, always want to have the picnic at the same place, always want to spread the table the same way, always want to play the same games, and usually wind up by sitting around in a ring and playing 'Simon says "Thumbs up,"' or some other fool game. Next was a load of small boys, hanging out the sides and overflowing down the steps at the back of the 'bus, taking turns at chasing their hats and caps, which had a funny way of flying into the trees along the street or dropping into the dust. Two loads of girls came next, and then came our 'bus-load, a little more well-behaved than the smaller boys while we were in town, but

I knew what was before us as soon as we began passing orchards along the road.

"As soon as we started the boys began to call to the driver and to me, 'Say, Bob—' 'Mrs. Bell, tell Bob—' 'Bob, turn off at the next corner. We ain't a-goin' to take their dust.' 'Bob, take the other street, Bob. We can pass them.' And as if only to hush them up, he swung off at the first corner, while the boys madly waved their caps at the others, content to jog along in the dust from the teams ahead. A few blocks of faster driving and we swung into the country road past all danger of being passed by the other teams, and settled down, as much as a lot of boys ever settle down, to the four-mile drive. The dust was about two inches thick, and the sun was as hot as it ever gets here, and that's just about scorching.

"It didn't take so very long to drive to the big spring, and it was mighty nice there. Some of the big boys had driven down early and had up half a dozen big swings, and lots of the older ones brought hammocks along, and the big spring bubbled up nearly as cold as ice, and there was a nice sandy-bottomed creek for the children to wade in, and about half a mile away there was a swimming-hole for the boys, and they went there at least three times

before dinner, and some of them stayed there all day.

" I hadn't seen Frankie since we got to the church, hardly. He was off with a crowd of the college boys, who didn't have anything else to do but have a good time while they were home. But I tell you those boys had calmed down a good deal since Mark had made them give a dollar apiece for their two sticks of wood they stole. It certainly was good for them.

" But Frankie showed up in the last load. They'd driven real slow to miss the others' dust. There was about a dozen girls, and half a dozen boys. The Parkers, and the Allens, and ' John Maree,' and a widow that was visiting her. She was mighty young to have lost a husband, and she seemed almost too young to care much, for if I ever saw anybody carry on it was that widow. When they drove up she was sitting up on the seat with the driver, with Frankie's hat stuck back on the back of her head, and driving, flourishing the big whip as if she was bossing the world. I didn't say a word, but I thought a heap of things. And one of them was, ' If we spend our money to send Frankie to school just to have him learn to like that sort of thing, why, then we'll quit wasting it, that's all.' But then I thought, ' Yes, she is pretty

good-looking, and her figure is pretty good, only she's laced too tight, and her foot is a good shape, only the idea of wearing French heels to a picnic. Still, I don't suppose she's ever been in the country, so I can make allowances.'

"Of course, everybody gathered around the big spring, and the baskets and wraps were all piled up around the trees on the bank above. As soon as the crowd was unloaded, all the 'busses went back to town with orders to come after us at about half-past five o'clock in the afternoon. There wasn't a horse left around the grounds except the old nag the Gilliflower sisters drives, and they wouldn't let anybody touch that old gray mare for a farm unless it was to unhitch it for them.

"The boys soon scattered, most of them to the swimming-hole, the girls to the hammocks and to gathering pebbles on the sandy shore, or to wading. Some of us older ones sat down to talk, and the girls and older boys went down to see the cheesemaker at work at the factory about forty rods away on the main road. We could just see the roof from the hill right back of the spring, though the water from the spring was piped right around the hill to the factory.

"It didn't seem any time till dinner, and then we sent after the scattered ones. There were two or

three boys around, the kind that always hang around the grown-ups and never go off to play with the others, and the kind I always want to slap. They're so afraid something will be said that they won't hear. One of these we sent to the swimming-hole, another to the factory, and we sent a little girl after the waders, and then got the dinner spread out. I think every time I go to a picnic that I never want to go to another. There's so much to eat. Not that I eat much, for I always find somebody to talk to, and so I can't keep up with those who just eat and nothing else.

"The young folks all gathered down at the other end of the long table-cloth where it was spread out in the shade of the big maples, and so I didn't have Frankie with me. He seemed to be devoting himself to the widow, or to 'John Maree,' according to whether the widow was smiling at him or at Pearl Rhodes, for she kept both of them, and three or four others, on the string. One must get her a drink of lemonade, and another must get her a 'dill pickle. What's a picnic without dill pickles?' and so on, while the other girls, except the one or two that had steady beaux that wouldn't be led astray, looked at each other once in a while as if — well, you know just how they looked, so I don't need to tell you.

"We were just getting through dinner, when somebody happened to look toward the factory, and saw the roof all smoking. With one yell, he started the whole lot of us, and I just had time to call out, 'Everybody take your pails,' before they all set out, even the widow diddling along on her French heels trying to keep up with 'John Maree,' who had grabbed the big lemonade pail, and in her dress-reform dress was leading the whole lot. It wasn't much more than a minute till most of us was there, the boys up on the roof throwing the water we passed up to them in anything we could get a hold of, big pails, little pails, whey tubs, anything to pass from hand to hand as we formed a line from the big water tank to the ladder the boys had gone up on.

"The big cheesemaker, roused from his nap, was out with the rest, dashing water up into the rafters from the inside and swearing loudly in Dutch and broken English. The extra ones were all helping the poor housewife carry out the household stuff from the other end of the factory, and it must have looked to them that had time to look like an ants' nest that's been torn open. But the only ones that had time to look were the little fat widow (she was fat when I saw her run) and the Gilliflower sisters, who hadn't dared leave the picnic-

ground till they'd packed up all their stuff for fear somebody would steal it. And they stood up on the bank above the factory and made remarks. I distinctly heard the widow ask the old maids, 'Who's that old woman that's bossing things?' And I'm not old, though maybe I did look that way after running forty rods in about a minute, and I admit I was running things, for I was the only one that had any wits about me enough to run things, for 'John Maree,' after beating us all to the factory, didn't know enough to get a line of pails started and the water to moving. But I didn't hear what the old maids told the little fat widow, for just then the boys yelled, 'Fire's out!' and we were all making so much noise over that that I couldn't hear anything more.

"Well, if we weren't a pretty looking lot! Hot and dirty, our hair all down, and our clothes all wet! All the boys, big and little, now it was over, adjourned to the swimming-hole, and when we got back to the picnic-ground, that spring saw more scrubbing, and doing up of hair, and pinning up of dresses, than it had ever seen before.

"We was all so hot and tired that we was ready then, at two o'clock, for the 'busses to come, and the Gilliflower sisters did get some of those hot, good-natured boys to hitch up their old mare for

them, and started home. 'The excitement was so trying,' they said. So there wasn't a horse left on the ground if anything should happen.

"By three o'clock, the children, from too much excitement and too much heat and too much cold water, were all cranky, and we had a lot of the littlest ones asleep on shawls and in hammocks.

"By four o'clock the older folks were as tired and bad-tempered as the youngsters. By five o'clock the young ones were ready to eat again and soon cleared up what was left. Then we began to look for the 'busses. At half-past five none showed up. We all moved our stuff gradually toward the big gate, but at six no 'busses had appeared. By half-past six we had a mob of squalling youngsters on our hands, some afraid, all tired, and most of them hungry.

"At a quarter of seven, one of the boys that we'd sent to the neighbours to see if we couldn't get them to take us back to town came back and said they couldn't come till after they'd hauled the milk to the factory at eight. That meant those children wouldn't get home till nine, and their mothers would be having fits over them.

"Just then we heard a shout, and a boy drove up in a two-seated buggy. 'Fire in town,' I heard him say, 'the livery-stable burned, horses

saved, but all the 'busses and harness burned.' Then I got to him, 'See here, Willie, can't you take a load of these babies back to town? Their mothers will be crazy. You ought to get eight at least of them in that buggy. Can't you? It won't be any load.' 'Eight kids! Gosh! Yes'm, I'll try.'

"Then I began, with the help of 'John Maree,' to load eight of the smallest into the carriage, but there we ran on to snags. Every one of those youngsters had a sister or brother that they didn't want to leave, but finally 'John Maree' climbed in, too, and the ten of them started. I was surprised that the widow didn't insist on going, too, but the load was started before she realized that 'John Maree' was going, she was so busy with the boys she was talking to. She didn't say much, then, but I bet 'John Maree' heard from her that night.

"When they had driven away, I said, 'Now, the rest of us will start to walk. We'll leave all the baskets and wraps here at the factory, and we'll walk as far as we can stand, and be that much nearer town when the folks send after us.' I hadn't a doubt that as soon as the rigs from the other livery got back from the Leighton funeral, they'd be sent after us.

"There were still a few of the very littlest ones

left, but the big boys divided them up amongst them, and carried them pickaback, and we all started. I don't know how many there were, but there must have been at least sixty of us. I kept behind so as to see that none were left behind to be scared half to death on the dark road, for it was getting a little dusky by this time.

"We had gone about half a mile when we came around a corner at the top of a big hill, and saw the light of the fire over the town. Then the youngsters set up a howl, one in particular knew her house was burned, and her new dollie was in it, too. The boy who was carrying her, it was Bob Allen, tried to stop her crying, but he couldn't, and the widow sat on a stump beside the road and made fun of him. I could see right there where one admirer of hers disappeared, and I guess she saw, too, for she tried to get the attention of the other boys more than ever, but each of them had a forty or fifty pound bunch of wiggling young one on his back, so he had all he wanted to think of. Frankie had offered his arm to me, but I'd sent him to help out one of the smaller boys who had bravely tried to carry a still smaller boy, so I had to trudge on alone, and all the time when I heard the little French heels slipping and sliding over the rocks in the road ahead of me (she wouldn't stay behind

for fear of the dark, though she was growling all the time about her feet and her headache), I couldn't help thinking about her calling me old, and I'd stir them up to walk a little faster.

"The dust was thick, and the night air was as hot as the day's had been, and we trudged along, the youngsters sobbing from fear and dead-tiredness, and a more miserable lot I never saw.

"Suddenly we heard a shout ahead, and there came Willie with his buggy, and 'John Maree,' and three 'busses from the other livery, and back of them Jim and our team. Willie had to go on farther into the country, so 'John Maree' piled out, and the widow fell on her neck. Then they all piled into the 'busses but Frankie and me, and we climbed in behind that team of Jim's, and you know how they can go. Well, that's the way they went. And I thought that night when I got home, and was getting rested up, that an old woman who can stand what I stood yesterday is really about as young as any little fat widow with French heels."

CHAPTER XVII.

FRANKIE AND THE WIDOW

"LET me see. Last time I was here was just after the picnic, wasn't it? Yes, that was after Mark was taken sick and I wrote the letter. Well, when I got home from here, I began to feel pretty tired, but Friday morning I ran down to see how Mark was. I'd been down every day for a minute. The new nurse had got started in nicely, she'd been there nearly a week, but Mark seemed just about the same only he wasn't delirious so much, and he's been just that way ever since. I go down every day, but there doesn't seem to be anything I can do, and Doc Jefferson seems so sure he's going to pull him through all right, that I'm hopeful, too. But I've had things this week and a half since the picnic to keep me a-thinking.

"You remember the little fat widow with the French heels that went to the picnic. Well, the next day when Jim and I came out here, Frankie,

of course, had to go 'round to call, to see how she'd stood the walk home. She was sick, 'John Maree' told him, so he didn't see her that afternoon. He called the next day and she was all right again, and now she's getting him to thinking that she's always all right. Day before yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that, and so on back to Sunday, when he took her to church in the evening, he's been there every day both morning and afternoon, and to-day when I asked him if he didn't want to come out here with us, he said he was mighty sorry, but he had promised to play tennis with Mrs. Yates, she's the one, you know.

"Yesterday he wasn't there, for I thought I'd put a stop to his going there so much. I could have stopped it squarely if I'd set my foot down, but when a boy gets to be twenty-three, he's pretty apt to have an idea that he knows enough to run things himself, so I didn't like to let him know that I didn't approve of the widow.

"Instead of that I wrote a note to 'John Maree,' and asked her and Mrs. Yates over to our house to tea last night. Jim was out here, and so there would be just us five, for I asked Mary Parker, too. Mary was to come early, and since she knows just what I think of the widow, and agrees with me pretty well, I told her when she got there just

what I was going to do, and how I was going to do it.

"I persuaded Frankie into thinking that he didn't need to go after the girls. They knew where we lived, and I said he'd have to go after some things to Parkers', so I sent a note by him to Mary, telling her to keep him there until she came, so he couldn't go down to 'John Maree's' house and wear out their hammocks any more. Even Jim is getting funny about Frankie's case. The other day he was reading one of the magazines, and he handed over the thing to Frankie and told him to read that page. It was just an advertisement for hammocks.

"When he and Mary came, I sent him off on some little errand, and then told her my plans, and she fell right in with them. Pretty soon the others came, and I tell you the little widow did look stunning. She does know how to dress, and then to get her alongside 'John Maree's' barrel-churn dresses and mixed colours makes her look all the better.

"Frankie came in as soon as they came, and we sat there in the cool sitting-room and talked. I was at work on that old quilt I've been at ever since I married Jim. I lose the pattern every once in a while, and there's so much work on it I don't

ever expect to get it done, but I keep it to pick up once in a while. So we got to talking about quilts, and 'John Maree' was telling how unhygienic they are, when Mary said, 'Mrs. Bell, you have a lot of mighty nice quilts, I know. Let's see them.'

"She'd seen them all before, but it was just what I wanted her to say. So I went into the big chest and dug them out. I really had them on top, for I had had them all airing, and hadn't packed them away yet. First I brought out that old 'log cabin' quilt, and then a 'rising sun,' and another and another, till I had eight or ten spread over chairs and things. Last I brought out that awful one my sister made, the one she did everything herself, from growing the flax clear to dyeing the linen, and then cutting it up in little bits and sewing it together again, and of all colours in the world she couldn't have chosen anything worse than those two, purple and orange.

"That one I shook out and dropped right on Mrs. Yates's lap, and then I went on, 'Yes, these are all to be Frankie's. Jimmie has had his share, and I do hope Frankie will get a wife that will care for such things, and not go for everything that's new-fangled. He likes old-fashioned things. Then I've got some old furniture that was my mother's, a beautiful horsehair lounge, and six

chairs, elegant parlour chairs.' Now I hate horse-hair furniture as I do poison, and those old things packed away up-stairs I'll never dig out, but I could see Mrs. Yates was writhing at the thought, and I went on, 'Yes, I suppose he's getting to the age where he's thinking about marrying.'

"Frankie scowled at me, but I beamed on them all as if I hadn't a thought in my head, and went on, 'I do hope he'll get one of the kind that will care for the things he likes. I'd hate to go to his house after he is married, and see all these good bedclothes packed away and not cared for, or only brought out to show, as a sample of the things his folks was used to.'

"The widow was looking at me as if she thought I was a lunatic, and Frankie was blushing and scowling, and Mary was trying hard not to giggle, but I went on as calmly as could be, 'And I'll tell whoever gets him that she's getting a prize. Why, he can cook and keep house almost as well as I can, and he can sew on buttons, and darn socks, and so on.'

"It was just as if I was saying, 'Yes, he's as tame as a house-cat. He may look wild, but he's warranted to purr if you rub him right.' I guess there's nothing that knocks that kind of a woman's liking for a man in the head quite as quick as

thinking he's quiet. They want the daredevil kind, and I guess Frankie had let her think he was a little inclined that way, but I think I knocked that in head.

"Then I went on, 'Now the supper we're going to have to-night, Frankie got all himself.' It was just as if I'd said, 'He ain't but three, but ain't he cute?' and I could see Frankie shaking his head at me, and 'John Maree' listening respectfully, as she always does, and the widow staring at me as if she thought I ought to be shut up somewhere. I thought I'd said enough for then, so I slipped out to see if things was all right.

"When I came back, the widow and 'John Maree' were standing at the window talking, and Frankie and Mary were folding up the quilts. I saw Frankie give that awful one a shake as if he'd have liked to tear it to bits, and he was so glum he could hardly speak, but Mary was having all she could do to keep from laughing.

"I called them to the table and seated them, the widow next to me, then Frankie, then Mary, and 'John Maree' next to me on the other side. I said, 'Frankie, you ask the blessing,' and he stumbled through the one he used to use when he was a little fellow. That reminded me, and I told of how he always used to ask the blessing at the same time

his father did, when he was a little fellow before I knew him, and how one day when the preacher came and started to ask the blessing, Frankie started in, too, and it rattled the preacher so he switched into the Lord's Prayer, and said that through to the end.

"That reminded me of some more of his childish habits and tricks, and I started in on them. Frankie kept getting blacker and blacker with every story, and when he'd pass something to Mrs. Yates, every time I'd say, 'Now do try that. That's a favourite dish of Frankie's, and he made that all himself.' At last he got so mad that I thought I'd better stop till we all got to eating, but I started in then again, and kept on through the whole supper, story after story about Frankie and his mishaps, how cute he must have been as a baby, how hard he cut his teeth, and all the thousand and one little things that are so interesting about a man after you really care for him, but which are enough to make you keep from caring for him if you hear them the wrong time. And I took care she should hear them at the wrong time.

"Poor Frankie! I was sorry for him, but I thought he ought to be able to stand it. I was pretty tired of it myself, and I'd spoiled some of my best stories, too, by telling them at the wrong time.

Strange, isn't it, how it makes you dislike even a pet story if you tell it once to a crowd that doesn't appreciate it? Not that they all didn't appreciate it. Mary had the best time she'd had for years, she told me afterward, and I believe it, but she had the advantage of seeing the whole thing, and not just the half the others saw.

"Finally I wound up by inviting them all three to go to the river at the Rock Bend for a fishing trip. I'd asked Pearl Rhodes and two or three other boys, and there'd be four girls, one other beside the three there, and we'd start Monday morning, and stay as long as we wanted to. I thought after the start I'd made, about three days' fishing trip would settle the case of Frankie and the widow. 'John Maree' jumped at the chance, as I knew she would, and the widow brightened up at the mention of the other boys, and Mary agreed, and the other girl, Ada Rhodes, had already accepted, so it was decided we'd go.

"Mary stayed to help with the dishes after the others had gone, Frankie with them, of course. They were hardly off the porch before she grabbed me and whirled me out through the hall into the kitchen, where she pushed me into one chair, and she fell into another, and we laughed till we cried, and then wiped our eyes, and laughed again, till

we heard Frankie slam the gate on the way home, and it wasn't so very long, either. Then we jumped up and began hustling around.

"To-day when I asked him if he didn't want to come out here with us, he said, and I really think he meant every word of it, 'You bet I'd like to go, but I promised Mrs. Yates I'd play tennis with her this afternoon.' So chapter one of that story is over, and on Monday morning begins chapter two of the sad tale of 'Frankie and the Widow.'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FISHING TRIP

"YES, Katie, this is me. And I'm back from that fishing trip, with enough to tell you to take three days. What with the trip and what's happened since I got home, I'd have to stay here overnight to tell you about them, only I have to get back home to look after my company. Who is it? Oh, I'll get to that after a while. Now I'll start with last Saturday when I was out here.

"When I got home I found they'd had a little shower there, so Frankie hadn't gone around to 'John Maree's' to play tennis because it was so wet. I knew that since every other day he'd been there rain or shine, it was a pretty good sign, so I didn't say a word, but just entertained him as well as I could, and he stayed at home all evening.

"The next day it rained a little in the morning, but it was nice in the afternoon, and after Sunday school we all went out to Pipers' to dinner, and stayed all afternoon. We hadn't been there since I

don't know when, and they do think so much of both of the boys, ever since those winters they boarded them when they was in school, you know. When we drove back about six (Jim had to get back to milk, of course), I told Frankie he'd better stop and see if the girls were all ready to go in the morning. He didn't seem overly anxious, but he went. He found Pearl Rhodes there, so he didn't stay long.

"The next morning we was up bright and early, and began getting things loaded up. There was going to be 'John Maree' and Rosalie Yates, and Mary Parker, and Ada Rhodes, Pearl's sister (I'd invited her Friday morning when I happened to meet her on the street). The boys were Jim, and Frankie, and Pearl Rhodes, and Len Hilton, and Billy Brooks. We had the big carriage, and Billy Brooks and 'John Maree' and Mary Parker and I went in that, then Frankie and the widow in a hired buggy, and Len and Ada in another. Pearl Rhodes was going to drive out alone in his own buggy later. Jim came along behind with the big wagon and outfit.

"First, there was the wagon with a hay-rack on it, and over that hay-rack we'd put up arches, and stretched canvas over that, so it looked just like a gipsy wagon. Inside we had plenty of bedclothes,

and a tent for the men, and spring beds and mattresses, which we'd spread out across the rack at night for us women-folks.

"We got started at half-past seven, but we did it by Frankie's starting out in his buggy at six and going the rounds every fifteen minutes till they was all ready. We had Jim's team, and he drove the Pipers' team (we knew you couldn't spare one off the farm), and with the team we had, there wasn't any call to take anybody's dust, so we got right along. It was about eleven miles there, but we got there long before ten o'clock, and Billy had the team put out by that time. He's a hustler, the sort that everybody likes to have around because he's willing, and good-natured, and knows how. He never says much, because he ain't overly bright, but he's the best hand at a picnic or social that we've got in town. Then he doesn't have to work for his living, so he's always able to get off when he's wanted.

"Jim got along before some of the others, for the wagon wasn't a very heavy load for those big work-horses, and, as he said, he'd rather push them while it was cool than keep them out in the sun. But I told him that he was just afraid that I'd flirt with Billy Brooks. That was the only reason he hurried. I couldn't get him to do anything but

grin, so I quit picking on him, and began bossing Billy. He was perfectly happy when the wagon came, and before Jim had the horses unhitched Billy had the tent out and had started putting it up. He'd already cleared a place for it on the bank beside the road, with the axe he'd stuck in the bottom of the carriage, and which Mary was in mortal terror of all the way out, for fear it would cut her feet. By the time the others got there he had the tent up, the beds made up inside, and had the spring beds and mattresses all piled out under the wagon, except one, which he placed across the front of the rack. 'Some girl have headache. Want to lie down,' I heard him mutter. Then he went to work with the axe, and in less than half an hour he had a pair of steps leading up to the back of the wagon. By noon we were all settled, and this is how we were fixed.

"On a little hill just above the river, where the road was good and wide, the wagon stood. It wasn't under the big oak-trees, but where it was shaded by them all day. About twenty feet away, up on the bank, was the tent, and the horses were tied to pegs, 'picketed,' Billy called it, about four or five rods away, so they wouldn't disturb us, and the flies wouldn't come around. Across the road from the wagon was the fireplace in the bank, and he

afterward fixed up a table with a plank or two he found as driftwood on the river-bank. The road we was on wasn't a main-travelled one, but the bridge just below us was in good condition, and there was a deep ford just above the bridge. The two roads, the one to the bridge and the one to the ford, branched off just a rod or two below where the wagon stood, and the water was about three rods farther.

" It was time to eat by the time they all got there, and Billy, who had appointed himself cook, had a mighty good picnic lunch. Of course nearly everything had been brought from home all cooked, but he baked potatoes on a sheet iron under a pan, and made hot coffee, and it tasted fine.

" Frankie and the widow hadn't been the last to get there although they had gone around a mile farther (to see if the road wasn't shorter, I guess), so I knew the case wasn't as bad as it might have been.

" In the afternoon the girls all lay down to sleep, and the men went swimming up to the dam a half-mile above. It was too hot to fish, they said, and we women-folks wasn't sorry they went, for we'd all brought along old things, and the widow had a stunning regular bathing-suit, and as soon as they was out of sight, we skipped in the other

direction, and went swimming, too. Only we had to come back sooner than we wanted to, for we didn't want them to find us gone.

"Len Hilton had brought his dog along to watch things, and so we could leave, but the worst was when we got back all in our old wet things, and the dog didn't know Ada or any of us, and chased us. Only Ada was last, and she fell down, and then he knew who she was. The rest of us circled around and had a chance to get into the wagon while he was barking at her and playing around her. Before she could get back to us we heard a team come driving across the bridge, and the girls inside our wagon was a-giggling fit to die, and that dog was barking back in the woods and our wagon looked kind of queer, anyway, and so when the team got to the top of the hill by our wagon, I heard a man say, 'I wonder what that dog's barking at. You'd better get out and see. Pretty good-looking gipsy outfit, ain't it?' Then, as he heard the girls giggle, he said, 'Say, you in the wagon. Is that your dog barking? Do you want us to see what it is for you?'

"I stuck my head out the crack in the curtain behind, and I know I looked as much like the Witch of Endor as anybody could, for the handkerchief I'd had around my head when I went

swimming had fallen off, and my hair got wet and came down, and it was still down, and I said, 'Yes, that's our dog, and we know what he's barking at, and it's none of your affairs, and you can go on just as soon as you're a mind to.'

"I'd got started before I see who it was, and then I wanted to fall through the bottom of the wagon, for it was the editor of the *Banner* out stirring up his correspondents, and he knew me, and drove off, laughing. But he won't dare put anything in the paper about us, for if he does, he won't get to any more of our church socials without paying, and he can't afford to pay, I know that. But they do say that he writes these here stories for the magazines and papers, and I'll bet he'll put me and my head of hair into one of those.

"As soon as they was gone, Ada climbed in, but the dog kept on barking until two of the boys came running down to see what was the matter. I had my hair brushed up some by this time, but the girls was giggling worse than ever, so I stuck my head out again and made up some yarn to tell them, and they went back after the rest of their clothes.

"By the time they all got back, and the girls got dressed and out again, it was getting nearly time to eat again, and Billy went to look after the supper,

and Jim and Frankie went to look after the horses, and Len and Ada went walking, and Pearl and the widow went fishing down on the bridge piers. They went off without any bait, and they only had one fish-line, and no pole, so I don't believe they cared much if they didn't catch anything.

"It wasn't very long till we had supper, but no fish with it. Billy said if somebody didn't catch fish for breakfast, he wouldn't cook any more, so Frankie and Jim both offered, but Len and Pearl never said a word. Then somebody suggested that we all get up and go fishing at five the next morning, but we all sat down on that.

"It was rather coolish after supper, and we all helped clear up things, then back in the woods, so as not to scare horses that came that way, we built up a big fire, and sat around it. It wasn't but a few minutes after we got the fire started till we heard horses galloping, and then somebody yelling, 'Hello!'

"The others were pretty much surprised when they saw it was Frank Brown, and with him a young man whom he introduced as Gordon Grimes, the man at whose father's he was painting and papering. I wasn't so surprised at seeing Frank, for I thought the word I sent to him by one of the neighbours out that way, that I saw at church

Sunday, would fetch him. But I was surprised at the other man. I'd heard of Gordon Grimes before as one of the richest men in the county, and as the awkwardest, and I could almost believe the latter. He is about six feet two, and built in proportion, but he walks as awkward as a blind horse, and his hands are always in the way, and he trips and stumbles and then blushes till his ears look as if they'd burn up, and yet he goes everywhere, and seems to have a good time.

"I thought he'd be lonely with all the girls and boys teasing each other in the jolly circle around the fire, and yet he seemed to get on well enough for him. When he joined us, I motioned to a place between 'John Maree' and me, and he tried to sit down, but his knees would get in the way, and he couldn't twist his feet around under him, and when he half lay down like the others, he shut off everybody on the other side. He turned to talk to me at first, but then he couldn't see 'John Maree,' and he was getting interested in what she was saying, so he turned his back squarely on me, and I chuckled to myself.

"Mary was on the other side of me, and Frank had sat down next to her. In a little while he looked up and kind o' raised his eyebrows. I didn't say anything, but just nodded, and so he and Mary

went for a walk. After a bit, Pearl and the widow didn't wait for my permission, but strolled away. Len and Ada and Frankie were talking on their side of the fire, and Billy and Jim were dozing. Finally I said, 'Jim, you'd better go to bed if you're going fishing in the morning. I'm going now. Don't you young folks sit up late.' So I crawled into the wagon, where Jim had fixed the beds and mattresses right after supper, and was soon asleep.

"I don't know what time the others came in, but I do remember waking up sometime in the middle of the night. It was after the moon was up, and that didn't come up till after eleven. And I heard Frank Brown say, 'Good night, Mary.' Then, after a while, I heard his voice again, 'Oh, Gordon, come along. Don't keep Miss Higgins up any longer. Let her get a little beauty sleep.' Then I sat up and looked around, and when the curtain was pulled aside, and 'John Maree' came in, do you believe it? All four of the girls were in, and Ada and the widow were fast asleep. Well, I stayed awake at least an hour what with the bright moonlight on the roof and thinking over that, that 'John Maree' Higgins should have a beau, and not only that, but should actually be the last one in of those four girls.

"The next morning we didn't hear a sound till Billy pounded on a pan for breakfast. He pounded before he began cooking the fish Jim and Frankie had caught. So we had nearly time to dress before breakfast was ready.

"Things went about the same that day. None of us, except Jim and Frankie, fished any, and we just ate and talked. Only, after noon, the little widow had a headache. We was all sitting in the shade of the bridge on a big rock, and I said, 'Better let Frankie prescribe for you. He usually helps mine.' But she snapped out right at him when he started to pull out a little case he carries a few things in his pocket in, 'No, thanks, I can't stand these young doctors that think they know it all, just because they know the names of a few of the diseases and some of the muscles.' Frankie was mad, and I didn't blame him, but 'John Maree' offered just then to rub her head, so they went back to the wagon, and we didn't see any more of them till supper-time.

"After supper we sat around as usual, and Frank and Gordon came a little earlier than the night before. They had about five miles to ride, so I said, 'Now, why don't you stay all night? I guess they can make room for you in the tent, and you can start by sun-up in the morning, and get home

to breakfast.' They seemed glad to accept. 'Only everybody has to be in bed by moonrise. That's about midnight.'

"Gordon and 'John Maree' seemed to have plenty to talk about, and of course Frank and Mary had. They were one reason I'd planned this trip, and I was as anxious they should have a chance to talk as I was anxious Frankie and the widow shouldn't want to. And apparently these last two didn't want to, for he had sat at the opposite end of the table at supper, and now sat next to me on one side the fire, while she and Pearl were on the other.

"Frankie and Billy and Jim went to bed early, and I went a little later. I didn't hear any of the girls come in, but I waked up just as the moonlight struck the roof, when I heard the men kicking around outside. By the time we heard what it was, we were all awake, and then we listened while Billy told what had happened. How Gordon had been the last to bed, and how, in crawling into the tent, he had pushed the tent-pole to one side, and when he stood up, as he foolishly did, he knocked down the ridge-pole with his head. They got fixed up in a few minutes, but before I got off to sleep again, I heard the wind rising and noticed the big clouds flying across the face of the moon.

"At last I got asleep, and I hope I'll never wake up again to what I waked up to then. That was an awful flash of lightning that seemed to flare right in our faces, and then the most horrible clap of thunder. The whole top of the wagon I thought was going to be lifted off by the wind that was howling through the trees, and I let out one screech as I felt the jar, and knew the wagon was moving backward. Then I heard the rain just pour down. I was clear at the front end of the wagon where I could hear the tongue sliding and dragging over the stones as we rolled faster and faster down the hill. I clawed at the curtains and just had them open, when another flash of lightning scared me so I fell back on top of the girls, who were below me. By that flash I saw we were flying along right toward the ford. By this time all of us were squealing at the tops of our voices, though not one but me knew what was happening. Suddenly we heard a big splash and then felt the wagon stop, and I tried to open the front again.

"The men had heard us now, and were rushing out, dressing as they ran. First came Frankie, and close behind him were Gordon Grimes and Frank Brown. I couldn't see a thing, but I knew their voices. I had crawled through the curtain on to the seat by the time the next flash came, and

then I saw where we were, and I heard Gordon yell, 'Great Scott, somebody get the horses. Wind blew the wagon into the ford, and with this rain the river will be up in fifteen minutes so everything will go.' By the same flash I saw somebody behind him run toward the horses. The girls stopped their noise when they heard the voice, and began crawling over the beds to the front. In a second there were four of us on the seat, and then they were quiet from fear of the black water that they could hear pulling at the wagon, pushing at the wheels, running black and smooth for a rod in front of the wagon, and even running through the bottom of the box.

"In another second I heard Frankie's voice in front, 'Where are you?' The widow gasped out, 'Oh, Frankie, here. Take me!' He said quick and sharp, 'You don't like young doctors. Where's mother?' In a minute or so I was standing on the bank wrapped up in the blanket I'd grabbed. Frank Brown and Mary were on the other side of the road under the bridge, where he had carried her. Gordon was right behind Frankie on the other side, and I heard him say, 'Miss Higgins?' 'Oh, Mr. Grimes,' was her only answer, and in a shake she was beside me. He stopped to say as he put her down, 'You're not hurt?' and she said,

'Oh, no, but aren't you afraid—' He laughed, and splashed in again, and by the time he was back with the widow, Frankie had made another trip and brought out Ada, and all of us were safe ashore, but the rain was just pouring down.

"Len and Jim came down with the horses then and Pearl finally arrived, and in a minute the team was hitched on, just by feeling, and with Jim driving, and Gordon pushing, that wagon was yanked out of that pretty quick. It hadn't gone out very far because it struck a big rock, but it took a hard pull to get it out. As soon as the wagon was up the hill, the boys piled rocks in front and behind the wheels till it couldn't move an inch.

"When we got ready to go back to bed we found the bedclothes had shaken down into the bottom of the wagon and were soaking wet. Frankie hustled over to where Billy had his fireplace and pulled out some dry wood and a kerosene can from under the bank, and in a minute more we were wrapped in dry blankets from the tent, and standing around a big fire, while the wet blankets dried on the bushes around and the rain poured down around us. The trees were thick enough so we didn't get much of it.

"In a minute we heard a shout, and we turned to see Billy Brooks, who hadn't shown up till now,

when he strutted out in a pair of pants that came up under his arms, and of which the legs were turned up to his knees. Just then Gordon came in sight, and we saw the explanation, and if ever a crowd saw anything funny, it was that. There stood Billy Brooks, five foot four tall, and about as thick through, with those pants on, and beside him, Gordon Grimes, six foot two, in those short trousers of Billy's, coming just below his knees, and dripping water over his big, bare feet. Gordon gave one look, then grabbed Billy and skipped for the tent. We heard Billy kicking, but Gordon came out in a minute with his own dry clothes on, and Billy came out wrapped in a blanket, and spread out his trousers to dry. By this time Jim and Len had the horses in the thick woods under the pines, Frankie had the beds rearranged in the wagon, and as our blankets were pretty well dried out now, one by one we got to bed, though it kept on pouring till nearly morning, and I didn't get to sleep again thinking of that awful ride into the ford."

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. JIM AND FRANK BROWN

"THE others slept as well as they could expect after the excitement. The widow was the first to get to sleep, I think, and I guess 'John Maree' was the last. It certainly was a new thing for her to have any one show any interest in her.

"The rain stopped during the latter part of the night, and when we got up it was as clear as could be. I got up the first of those in the wagon, and I'd hardly climbed down over the front of the wagon before Frank Brown came up to me. I was surprised, for I supposed he and Gordon had gone long before. As it turned out, Gordon had, but Frank had stayed to see me.

"'Mrs. Bell,' he said, 'I want to have a long talk with you. I couldn't work at painting till it dries off a little, anyway, so I stayed to see you. Now, it's pretty muddy, but if we can get to the bridge, that's as dry as anywhere, and we can walk back and forth without getting covered with this

clay.' So we picked our way over the scattered rocks till we got to the bridge, and then he went on:

"'Mrs. Bell,' he said, as soon as we got to the bridge, 'I want — we want you to know, Mary and I, that we are going to be married soon.' I told him how glad I was, and he only said, 'We knew that you would be, or you wouldn't have helped us as much as you have. But, Mrs. Bell, I've always said that I'd never marry a girl if I had to run away to be married. Now, Mrs. Parker will never give her consent. Of course, Tommy — I mean Mr. Parker — is all right, and he told me last spring that he approved, and I know he hasn't changed his mind, but he won't stand out against her in anything. I suppose it's as well for his peace of mind that he shouldn't. I'm afraid she would make it uncomfortable for him if he did. Now, we're not trying to flatter you, but we know you can help us out, for neither of us ever saw you when you didn't seem to know what to do. So, Mrs. Bell, will you help us get married without having to run away? We'll have to leave it all to you, for we don't know what to do.'

"When he was quite done, I said, 'Now, are you all through? If so, I'll say what I have to say. Are you willing to marry Mary Parker without her mother's consent? We'll say nothing of her

father's, for that doesn't count. Are you willing to take the girl you love from a home, more or less happy, from her own people, and to be to her father, mother, brothers, and sisters, as well as lover and husband? No, don't say anything till I get done. It's the most solemn thing in life to marry the one you love. It is one of the most important things in life that a man can undertake, in a business way, in a social way, in every way, but the importance of it for the man is not one ten-thousandth of the importance for the woman. You men don't seem to realize that when a woman marries she gives up everything, while you give up only your freedom. Freedom, name, friends, family, home, all these she gives up freely, and what do you give up? Perhaps your goings and your comings are a little hampered. You can't drop work as freely as when you were single. You have to stick to work you don't like, but otherwise what difference is it to you? And the difference to her is, of course, less, if her family and her friends are in accord with her in her giving up, but when they are not, then all the great differences are multiplied a hundred times. Now, do you really mean that you will accept Mary's love, at the cost to her that it means? Will you let her leave her home for you, and against her mother's wish? And how

do you know that now her mother won't consent again? Now that she knows the true state of Ben's affairs? And she does know, for Mary told her. Have you asked her consent again? No? And you were going to say you never would? Well — if I were a man, and a woman loved me, and I loved that woman, I'd do everything I could to make that woman happy.'

"'Now, Mrs. Bell, you needn't say another word. I do love Mary, and she loves me, and we are both willing to give up what we can for the other. But I'm proud, not too proud to do the work I'm fitted for, but too proud to run the risk of having to bite my tongue and grate my teeth to keep from saying things to Mary's mother I'd be ashamed of later. I'm sorry if you can't help us. I know Mark Williams would, but he's sick and I can't even ask him.'

"'Now, Frank,' I says, 'don't get it into your head that I'm not going to help you. Just because you're so proud you won't give yourself the chance to have it easier, I will help you, for if anybody ever needed it, it's you. I don't much blame you for not going to Mary's mother again, for she's certainly just waiting to give you a tongue-lashing. If she had seen you with Mary the Fourth, there surely would have been fireworks. Now, though, before I decide on what to do to help you, you'd

better tell me just what your prospects are. I can make my plans better if I know, and I'll feel safer in interfering still farther in what is really none of my business.'

"By this time the planks at the end of the bridge under the trees were dry, so we sat down on the railing, and he told me how he'd been planning to settle at Waterville, where there was more building, and where he had already a house nearly finished. It was started before Mrs. Parker broke off the engagement, and while he was hoping to be married in the fall. He knew his business there would be twice as much as he'd had here, and he wouldn't have to work out of town at all to make it.

"Then, too, he said, 'Waterville is only about twenty miles away from here, and Mary could come home—' but I broke in, 'That's just where you are mistaken. When once she leaves home, she'll be gone for good as far as the Parkers are concerned. Remember Ben, and how he was just about driven from home. Don't count on her having the chance to come home.'

"'Well, then,' he went on, 'it won't be so far for you to come and see us. For you'll have to. We don't want the Waterville folks to think our folks are ashamed of us, so you'll have to come and see us, and pass off as Mary's mother.' 'Not

much,' I said, 'I don't adopt any girls. I'm willing to be mother to boys, but girls — that's a different proposition. Someway, I know boys, and know pretty well what they'll do next, but girls, I never did pretend to know, but I'll tell you what I will do. I'll wait and pass myself off as grandmother to the first baby — Now, you needn't blush so. There'll be babies, — God pity you if there aren't. And I'll grandmother any number of them. It's fun to be grandmother. Now, Frank, I've thought of a scheme. Suppose you go and get Mary and we'll talk it over. You can tell her what we've been talking about if she doesn't know already.'

"I sat there and waited, and it wasn't very long till they were back. Then Mary sat down beside me and Frank stood up in front of us, and I told them my plan, and explained just how the whole thing would work, and how I was going to get around Mrs. Parker, and what each must do, and told Mary how any sewing she wanted to do she could do on my machine at my house, and I'd gladly help her.

"No, Katie, you needn't ask what my plan is. I don't tell them till they get past the egg stage. Plans and eggs are safer counted when they're fully hatched.

"By that time Billy called us to breakfast, and

we had a jolly time over that. Everybody had to tell what he remembered of the night before, and the only thing we could all remember was the way Billy and Gordon looked in each other's trousers. It was lucky for the big fellow that he wasn't there to hear the fun, or he'd have been too embarrassed ever to speak again.

"I noticed, but didn't say anything, of course, that Frankie and the widow were just on speaking terms, and that was all I could ask. I guess she was mad at his neglect of her the night before. She didn't look so young and fresh this morning, and the wrinkles showed. I guess her powder-puff must have got into the water in the bottom of the wagon, for her complexion wasn't quite so good as usual. No, I didn't make way with that, or the rose balm, or whatever she used on her face. Not that I wouldn't have liked to, but if I couldn't beat her out without being tricky, I'd give up. Not that I arranged that runaway wagon business, not at all, but I've noticed that in this world if you count on things happening, lots of times they happen, and if they don't, you're not out any, for if you're wise, you knew all the time they wouldn't happen, and have your plans made accordingly. That's what I did, but I didn't have to use those plans.

"I thought at breakfast that they were out, and I knew it when Frankie told me he was going to drive the carriage and Billy was to drive Pearl's horse. I could see the rest of the arrangement easy enough, and I approved most highly.

"It didn't take us very long to pack up after breakfast, and by eight o'clock we were well on our way home. As soon as we got there, I left Frankie to bring in the stuff, after he'd taken Mary and 'John Maree' home, and I skipped down to Mark's to see how he was.

"I ran on to Doc Jefferson, and he said the first thing, 'He's better at last. But we've got to do something to rouse him. He won't get better fast unless we can cheer him up some way. I leave it to you to arrange that. The nurses are all right to nurse him, but we have to have some one who knows him to brighten him up.' 'Can he stand a shock if need be?' I asked, 'nothing bad news or anything like that.' 'A little shock, if it's good news, will be all right. I have told the nurses to help you all they can.'

"I started back home, thinking hard, and I hadn't got a bit ahead by thinking, when I got back to the house, only I'd made up my mind to one thing, and I went in at the back door, and started to get a lunch ready when I heard the door-bell ring.

But, goodness, there come the men to dinner already, so I'll have to leave the door-bell unanswered till after dinner. Then we'll have a chance to go on."

CHAPTER XX.

THE STRANGER

"Now, we're down again, and the children's asleep, and we're likely to have a quiet afternoon, I'll go on with my story.

"I was just setting the lunch on the table when I heard the bell ring. I didn't hurry to the door, for I thought there wasn't any special need, as it was probably just some of the neighbour children on an errand or something. I never have been able to teach them to come to the side or back door when they want something. At last I got things pretty well in shape, and started to the door. That door hadn't been opened since I got back, and so the key was hanging up, and I had to fuss around to get the key to work, and when I did get the door open, instead of the young one I expected to see, there stood a little woman, middle-aged, I guess, with the trimmest brown dress on I'd seen for some time. And in spite of the heat she looked as cool and composed as could be. My first thought

was 'book agent,' then the suit-case that stood on the porch, and just matched her dress, told me she wasn't that. I didn't get any farther than that, for I caught sight of the dirt and dust all over that porch, and I didn't wonder she stood up instead of taking one of the rocking-chairs. Then in the corner next the railing was a whole lot of litter the neighbour young ones had carried up there playing house. I wondered then what she thought of my housekeeping. All the time while I was wondering who she was, and so on, I was saying, 'Why, good morning. Won't you come in? Isn't it hot and dusty?' and I could see by the change in her expression when she stepped inside that I didn't need to apologize for the dust on the porch. She understood already.

"I don't know when I've seen a body I was so attracted to on short acquaintance. Little, trim, quiet-voiced (I'd noticed that when she asked, 'Is this Mrs. Bell's?'), it was a pleasure just to have her in the house.

"She started to tell me who she was, but before she got any further than, 'I want to tell you who I am—' I knew who she was, and blurted right out, 'You're Polly Hawkins, aren't you?' She nodded, and I went right on, 'Well, Mark's better. Isn't that good? And the doctor says he

needs something to cheer him up. And that's to be you.' Then I happened to think that she'd feel better if she could have something to eat and a little rest, so I said, 'Now the men-folks will be in to lunch directly. Don't you want to go to your room?' Then I showed her up to that big north room. It was close, of course, for the house had not been opened for three days, but I soon had it aired, and brought up fresh water.

"I went down to set an extra place, and I wanted to pinch myself every step to make me know for sure that Polly Hawkins had come, and was right in my house. I'd felt sure all the time that she would come, but after it really happened, I wasn't so sure, after all. That's so often the way.

"Frankie and Jim wanted to unload before lunch, so I had time to add something warm to the meal to make it more tasty. I was busy in the kitchen, when I heard her coming down the stairs, and I called her right out where I could talk to her. She said, 'Now, I know you haven't any help, so I'm going to help you just as long as I stay here.' 'All right,' I said, 'only there won't be much to do after I once get caught up. I've just been away for three days, and my work got behind, as you could see from the porch.' She smiled, and I knew she understood. Frankie came in then,

and after he'd been introduced, said, 'Ma, where are my old overalls and jumper?' I looked surprised, for I was, and I asked, 'Going to play tennis with the widow in those blue overalls?' 'Well, hardly,' he says, 'Frank Brown is anxious to get a job done, and asked me to help him. I'll ride out there this afternoon and go to work in the morning.' I didn't say anything, but I told him where he'd find what he wanted, and he went off up-stairs to get things ready. I was so glad to hear that he was going that I could hardly wait till he got out of the room before I turned around and said, 'If you've never raised a family of boys, Miss Polly, you don't know what a relief it is to know that they're not falling in love with the wrong girl. Now, I know you don't know a thing about us, but I mean you shall, and I'll begin by telling you that I've got two boys. I'm only a stepmother, but they're just as much my boys as if they were my own, for I raised them from fourteen and twelve years, and I've pulled them out of love with the wrong girls, and one of them into love with the right one' (and she'll see that, Katie, when I bring her out here to see you next week). 'And what Frankie just said shows me that he's safely over his latest crush.'

"Jim came in then, and we had lunch. Frankie

was rather curious to know who Miss Polly was, but he thought she must be some one I'd met that had visited in town before. Your pa didn't seem to care very much. Seemed to think if she was there and I liked it, it must be all right. He's altogether too well satisfied with things. It would be lots more exciting if he didn't think everything I did was all right. But I suppose it's better that way than if he thought nothing I did was right. I know some men that are that way, but it's just as well for Jim that he never got into that way of thinking.

"As soon as lunch was over, Jim started off with the team and wagon, and Frankie started off, too, so Miss Polly and I were left alone. I told her while we was clearing up the table (we were going to leave the dishes till next morning), that I'd ridden eleven miles that morning, and I didn't care if my house did look like everything. I was going to sit down and talk this afternoon, and after a good night's sleep I'd feel more like work.

"In the first place I told her as soon as we sat down about Frank Brown and Mary Parker, and Ben Parker's coming home, and how his mother acted, and so I got around pretty soon to Mark Williams, and how he had taken care of Ben, and what we all felt about him. Then I got on to the story of Margaret Lee, only I told her just enough

so she'd know who we were talking about. Do you know, it's the greatest comfort to me to have somebody I can talk to about the town people. I'd die if I didn't have a chance to come out here and talk to you, and I know it's safe with you. With some people I might just as well be shouting it from the house-tops, and better, too, because people would hear it straight if they heard it that way. And I knew it was safe with Miss Polly. Isn't it odd how you know things about people first glance almost? Of course I knew what kind of a woman she must be for Mark Williams to care for, but I wasn't prepared to like her quite so well. And, Katie, do you know — I hate to confess it, but I was just a little bit jealous of her before I'd met her, but I wasn't a bit afterward.

"By the time I'd told her the state of affairs in Frank Brown's, Ben Parker's, and our Frankie's love-affairs, and mentioned my hopes in the case of 'John Maree,' it was pretty late in the afternoon, and I was beginning to think about supper, when who should come around the house but Margaret Lee. She and Miss Polly just seemed to take to each other right away, one reason, I suppose, on account of both their sweethearts being sick, for I could see that Mark Williams was still Miss Polly's sweetheart, and always would be. Hadn't I brought

up his name time and again all afternoon just to catch that look in her eyes that made me surer each time?

"Margaret stayed to supper with us, and she's been in every day since, and to-day she carried off Miss Polly for all day, so I came out here to tell you all about how things are going, and get caught up, for if it had gone much longer I'd had to stay a week just to tell you what's happening.

"After Margaret left that first evening, it was cool, so we all drove around town, and I showed Miss Polly the square and the court-house, and the church and the high school, and where the Parkers live, and the Lees, and then on the way back we stopped at Mark's. Mrs. Bright was on the porch, and she came out to the gate and we talked a few minutes. I didn't watch Miss Polly while we sat there talking, for I didn't think it would be quite fair, but I wondered on the way home, for she didn't say much, and I didn't care to talk, just how glad she was that she had come. I knew she was glad. I knew that the minute I heard her speak when she first came, and I knew it was a relief to her, after the weeks since she got my letter, to be now where she could hear how Mark was, and see what others thought of him.

"I was pretty well tired, and I was thinking of the cleaning up needed the next day, so I was glad when she said that since she'd had a rather long day (she'd had to start early), she thought she'd go to bed. I went up to see if everything was all right, and I was sitting by the window talking, while she was shaking out her skirts and unpacking her trunk (Jim had brought it right after dinner), when she suddenly laid down the brush, and walked over to where I was sitting, and asked, 'Mrs. Bell, why did you write that letter to me?' And I said in just the same tone, 'If you didn't like that letter, you didn't have to pay any attention to it. I guess I wrote that letter for just the same reason you came in answer to it, because I'd just a little rather see Mark Williams happy than anything else I can think of. Ain't that why you came?' She said, 'When that letter came, I said, "I won't go, I won't go." I kept on saying that for the two weeks and more since I got it, and I said it after I had sent my trunk to the station. But I'm not sorry I came. Oh, I'm so glad you wrote, and that you wrote just as you did. You don't look just as I thought you would, but you're just the same motherly soul I've needed to tell things to and to tell me things all these years. You know my mother died the year after Mark's sickness, and

then father and I have been so alone all these years.'

"By this time she was on the floor with her head on my knee, and I was comforting her the best I could. 'Miss Polly,' I said, 'do you know, ever since Mark told me his life story, I had made up my mind that if anything ever happened to him I'd send for you. He wasn't fair to you at first, and I thought he regretted it. When he's seen other people happy around him, there was always a little hurt look in his eyes as if he were thinking of what he had been cheated out of — of what he had cheated himself out of, and yet, I can't blame him. Until I saw you, I thought perhaps he had been right, and he wouldn't have been happy. I'm so glad you came, for now I know what he's missed.'

"At that she raised her eyes, and looked up at me. 'Mrs. Bell,' she said, 'how soon do you think I can see him? I've waited years, and been so unhappy, and now I just want to see him, just to see him, that's all. Have you a picture of him? It's twenty years now since we moved away, and — I want to get used to the change. For you will arrange it so I can see him, won't you? Is that — That can't be his picture on the dresser, can it?'

"'Miss Polly,' I said, 'if you'll promise not to get mad at me, I'll tell you something.' I started

to the door, and when I had it open, I turned and said, 'The day I wrote that letter to you I fixed this room for you, and I was so sure you were coming that I even put Mark's picture there on the dresser.' And I closed the door and hurried down-stairs with tears in my eyes."

CHAPTER XXI.

"OLD FOLKS' PICNIC"

"KATIE, I don't know where to begin, there's so much going on in town now. But I'll try and tell it in order. Let me see, I'll begin with the Old Folks' Picnic. That was yesterday.

"You know we never miss that picnic. I don't remember ever having stayed away from one since we was married, though we did think once we wouldn't go. But I always get just the best dinner I can because we always have two or three old folks eat with us, and I do want them to enjoy my good things.

"This year it was lots easier getting ready, for Miss Polly was there, and she's the greatest help. She has just taken right hold and helped ever since she came, and she can cook right well herself.

"We started early yesterday morning, Jim and I, for Miss Polly didn't go. I'll tell you why after a while, and Frankie is still out with Frank Brown working. We both wanted to get there to hear all

the speeches, and to see folks before the speaking began. We drove around by the square to get the mail, and who should I see but Ben Parker. Oh, yes, he's out. He's all right again, and working in the bank now. He boards at Pipers', so he has a long walk, but he seems to get along well on it. I wanted to ask him how he and Margaret were getting along, but thought I'd better not. I'd wait till I saw her and she could confide in me. Mary had told me when Ben first got out that her mother had written to him. She wouldn't go to see him when folks could see her, but she wrote and asked him to come home. I don't know just what he wrote back, but it was just what I thought he would write. I think it was that he couldn't think of coming home now he was well, if he wasn't wanted when he was sick, and that her treatment of Mary was enough to drive her from home as well. Said he was thankful he'd lost what money he had made, for it gave him the chance of seeing that his mother was still the money-grabbing sort, and so on. It wasn't the sort of a letter any son ever ought to write to any mother, but no mother ought ever to give her son any excuse for writing that way. Mary said, too, that her mother didn't show any signs of backing down about letting her and Frank have anything to do with each other,

in spite of her mistake about Ben's money, but that didn't seem to make any difference to Mary. She was doing some sewing, using my machine, and Miss Polly and I was helping her all we could, and it really began to look as if my plans for Frank and Mary were going through all right.

"But I'll never get to the picnic if I talk all 'round the county. We got down to the park where they always hold the picnic. Have a platform, and benches (not very comfortable ones, though, for they don't have backs), and a tank of ice-water, and an organ, and all the children for ten blocks around.

"When we got there, there wasn't more than two dozen, so we had a chance to see everybody and visit a while with them. Pretty soon more and more came, old folks and young folks, but mostly old ones, for every old man in the county wanted to get there to show that he was just a little heartier and spryer than somebody else, and they all had seats on the platform. There was old Elton, he was nearly always the oldest one, and as odd as Dick's hat-band — you've heard how odd that was, haven't you? Why, it went half-way 'round and tucked under. And the Widow Orvis that's ninety-eight years old. She hadn't been there for several years. She's Widow Orvis, now, but before that she was a Brown, and before that a Flower, and at least two

others before that; I can't remember all the names. And then there was the one who always reads a poem if she gets the chance, Ann Eliza Duncan, she is now, and always has been, though they do say that she had a chance to marry old Bill Nesbit once. Pity she didn't. She might have reformed him with her poetry.

"At last they began their exercises. I had my usual place. A tree that I could lean against stood near one of the aisles, and I leaned up against that, while Margaret Lee and Mary Parker and her mother sat near. Jim was somewhere around, when he wasn't up on the platform, and under the seat was the big basket of good things.

"They started out with reading the list of old folks there the year before, and they actually had your pa on the list. Well, he is getting old, lots faster than he would if he'd stayed in the country, too. But they don't ever get me to sign that list, not if I live to be a hundred. And then they argued, some because they were left out when they'd been there, and others because they was put in when they wasn't there. And the ones that seemed most put out was the ones put in.

"Then there was a quartette that sung some of the old songs that we used to sing when I was a girl, 'Wait for the Wagon,' and 'Lily Dale,' and

'Do they miss me at home, Do they miss me,' and I don't know what all. Then the speaker of the day came on, and he was just fine. He was pretty young looking, but he knew what he was talking about, and he told us about the first wedding in the county and the first school. His father had taught that first school, and some of the things he told it was pretty hard to believe.

"The first schoolhouse, he said, was only ten by twelve, out of logs, with benches made out of split logs, hewn smooth with an axe, and with legs stuck in auger-holes. The room didn't have any way of heating, for they only had school in the summer. For blackboards, there was a shelf filled with sand from the river, and when a boy worked a sum he smoothed a place on the sand and used his finger to make his figures. Then, when he was done, the next one smoothed it over. They soon got so crowded that there wasn't any place for the little ones, so they built a wide shelf out of hewn planks across one end of the room, and the teacher would lift the little fellows up there, and there they'd sit on their little bench they had and study their 'a, b, abs' out of their blue-backed spellers, or drop chunks of the mud chinking down on the heads of the big scholars below. I never heard anything told quite so funny as he told that. He'd been one

of the little shavers, so he knew. And he went on and told about the first preaching, and the first doctor, and who was the first baby born in the county, and whose was the first frame house, and all sorts of interesting things, till it was dinner-time, and then, best of all, he had sense enough to quit.

"They always furnish coffee and sugar and cream, so we had hot things to drink, and I gathered all my old folks and the young people. There was Mrs. Parker, and Mary, and Margaret Lee, and one of the younger Parkers. Then old Deacon Lysander Sproule, from Little Spring. He was your pa's first wife's great uncle. And Aunt Kezia Houghton, that keeps house for Doctor Jacobs, and then old Peter Hendricks, and his wife Priscilla, or Silly, as he always calls her. They're as poor as Job's turkeys, and as touchy about it as Job's boils. But I make them think I'm all right, and so they always eat with us.

"We had a mighty good dinner. Baked beans that beat mine all hollow (Miss Polly did them), and chicken, fried, of course, and peach pickles, and sandwiches, and pie, and cake, and I don't know what all. There was enough and to spare, so I fixed up a basket full after I got home for the Josephsons, the family with the nine young ones, two of them twins just arrived.

"After we were done they began the programme again, and I saw Ann Eliza Duncan on the platform with a paper roll tied with a blue ribbon, so I moved way back in the shade, where I could talk without disturbing anything, and yet could hear the singing.

"Just the last thing they had the best of all. The man that spoke in the morning came out, and I went down to hear what he said. He started out, 'My father told me years ago if I ever came back to this country he wanted me to hunt up old Joe Lagarde, "Leetle ole Joe, the feedler. Him feedle for first wedding, him feedle in the ole log cabin in the Tippecanoe campaign. Him feedle for the first dance at the State capital." I promised, and last week when I came back here from the West, I started to hunt him up. I didn't expect to find him, but I kept my promise, and I found "leetle ole Joe" down in his little cabin by the Shiowoc, and I asked him to come up here and show these young people how they used to play the fiddle in the olden days.' Then he led out a bushy-whiskered little Frenchman, with a fiddle under his arm, and little gold rings in his ears, and a twinkle in his eyes. A chair was pushed forward, and he sat down shyly on the edge of it.

"'Now, Joe, let's have "Money Musk,"' said the

man. And I don't care if we all were church folks, if our feet didn't just tingle to dance I never saw a crowd's that did. And from 'Money Musk' he swung into the 'Fisher's Hornpipe,' and 'Old Zip Coon,' and 'Hull's Victory,' and then to the 'Arkansaw Traveller,' and so on through all the old pieces we'd most of us danced to when we were children, and I could see those old men sitting there perking their heads forward so as not to lose a single note, and keeping time with their canes, and then when he'd stop for a minute they'd clap and yell like so many kids, and pretty often, too, I'd see the tears run down their cheeks as they turned toward their wives with a 'Don't you remember?' look. And I just had to laugh right out when I looked around and saw old Mr. Roberts, trustee in the Methodist church, now, too, sitting up straight and bobbing his head back and forth and humming to himself some of those old tunes. And I thought, 'It's lucky for you your grandchildren don't see you now. Your lectures against dancing wouldn't do much good.'

"At last the whole thing was over and everybody went away saying they hadn't enjoyed a picnic so much for years. And I know I hadn't, only I was kind of wondering how Miss Polly was getting along at home."

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS POLLY AND THE INVALID

"Now, Katie, I'll have to go back and bring up the rest of the story. The day I was out here when Miss Polly was over at Margaret Lee's, as soon as I got back we drove down to see how Mark was. I'd seen him several times before that, but I hadn't even mentioned Miss Polly. That day when I got down there, I found the doctor there. As soon as I got in he called me to one side and said, 'Mrs. Bell, Mark isn't getting well as fast as he ought. He's getting past my care, now. Can you suggest anything?' Now, that was just what I wanted, so I said, 'Doctor, why can't he be moved right up to my house? I have lots of room, and it's cool up there, and I'd be mighty glad to have him come. I know what to feed him, so you needn't worry about him one bit.' He was glad as could be, and Mark seemed to like the idea. I guess he was getting pretty tired of the wall-paper in the room where he was.

"So Jim went down late that afternoon with the spring wagon, and they moved him on to a cot, and brought him right up to the house on the wagon. Jim went back and got the wheel-chair, so he could use it as soon as he began to get around.

"I had the chair out of sight, and so Miss Polly didn't know a thing about his being in the house till the next morning, for she got home late. In the morning I got his breakfast ready, and then said, 'Miss Polly, will you take this in to Mark?' She had taken the tray as I held it out to her, but she nearly dropped it, she was so surprised. 'Where is he? Here?' I said, 'Yes, the doctor let me bring him up yesterday.' 'Oh, Mrs. Bell, I can't do it. I'm afraid he'd see — Oh, I can't.' 'Miss Polly,' said I, 'when the doctor let him come, and when I brought him, I thought that I'd have some help in taking care of him. It was too much for me alone. But now I might as well tell the doctor he can have him taken away. That we two strong, able-bodied women can't take care of him.' 'Oh, Mrs. Bell, I will help. I'll do everything I can, but not that — Yes, I'll do even that to-morrow, but not to-day.' 'All right, if you don't want to do your share to bring him around, you don't have to. But I must say, I thought you'd be glad to.' I tried to look disappointed, and I guess I did, for she turned

around and picked up the tray. 'I'll go, but you must go with me, Mrs. Bell.' Then, just as we got to the door, and I stepped ahead to open it, she whispered, 'Oh, is my hair all right?' I laughed and nodded, and we opened the door and went in.

"Mark was lying back among the pillows, his iron-gray hair bristling stiff all over his head, and his face nearly hidden by his bushy brown beard. He opened his eyes slowly, then started up. 'Polly, is it, really? I'm so glad you came. But how —' He didn't finish his question, for I saw she couldn't answer, so I broke in, 'Why, Mark, she's visiting me. Didn't you know that? Been here a week now.' By this time Miss Polly had found her voice, and went on, 'Oh, yes, Mrs. Bell and I are old friends now. But how are you this morning?' He smiled rather weakly as he said, 'It seemed pretty dark and dreary to me, but I can see the sun shining now.'

"I was afraid he'd talk too much, so I entertained them both, and as soon as he was through his breakfast we left him.

"No sooner were we in the kitchen than Miss Polly began scolding me. 'Mrs. Bell, you didn't give me a chance to say a word to him.' 'Never mind,' I said, 'you'll have plenty of chances yet. He'll take a whole lot of taking care of yet before

he's out of danger, and I guess you'll get your share, for I promised to help Mary Parker with her sewing, you know.'

"I guess it seemed like a long time to Miss Polly till dinner, and she came into the kitchen and fixed up his tray before I could get around to it. I was glad to see her do that, and she seemed to have forgotten all about her talk in the morning.

"The doctor was in in the forenoon, and he seemed pleased, and said in two days more Mark could go out in his wheel-chair for a few minutes in the morning. From that time on, someway, I got out of all care of Mark except in a general way, for his three meals a day, and a cooling drink every once in a while, were always ready before I got around.

"It was on Saturday afternoon we moved him, and by Tuesday he had been out on the porch in his chair, and Wednesday he stayed out nearly all day. I never saw anybody get along faster, and the doctor gave me a lot of credit. He didn't see Miss Polly, so he didn't give the credit where it belonged, but I told her what he said, and she just smiled. I wondered just what she thought about her trip, anyway. If it was worth while, say.

"On Thursday I said, 'Now, Miss Polly, I haven't missed a picnic of this sort for years, and

I don't want to miss this one to-day. Do you want to go, or do you think you can see that Mark has care taken of him to-day?'

"'Mrs. Bell, if anybody asks you, I'm not feeling very well to-day, so I'll stay at home and look after him. I don't suppose it will make folks talk, will it?' I knew she'd ask that, and I said, 'Miss Polly, if folks want to talk, they'll talk whether you give them any reason to or not, but I can't see that they can say a word against anybody for your staying here, except about me for gallivanting off to a picnic when I've got company. But I'll leave it to Mark whether I shall go or stay.'

"So I went in and asked Mark whether I should go, since I've never missed a picnic, and he would want to hear about it, and he said, 'Why, I can stay alone just as well, Mrs. Bell.' I said, 'Oh, you won't need to do that. Miss Polly isn't feeling very well, and she'll be here.' He started up. 'She isn't sick, is she?' he asked. 'Oh, no, just not feeling as if she'd like to go to the picnic.' He looked relieved, and I decided to go.

"I told you about the picnic, but I didn't tell you how glad everybody was to hear how Mark was improving, and of course they wanted to know if Miss Polly had gone home. I told them what she

said about not feeling well, and they all seemed satisfied.

"At last it was time to go home, and Jim brought up the horses and we started. We drove around with Margaret Lee, then came straight home, for I did begin to feel a little guilty over leaving my company to entertain each other. I didn't doubt their ability to do it, though.

"When we drove in, I didn't make any more noise than was necessary getting in at the side door. If they should be sleeping, I didn't want to disturb them, and if they shouldn't, still I didn't want to disturb them. So I walked into the house pretty quiet, and fixed up the basket for the Josephsons so Jim could take it, and then I began looking for my company. Mark's door was open, and he wasn't in, and his wheel-chair was gone, so I supposed he was on the big, shady, side porch, and I went out to see. I didn't make as much noise as I might, and yet I wasn't so awfully still, for I walked right along on the creaky porch, and around the corner, and — there I found my company holding each other's hands, and looking into each other's eyes.

"I didn't stop to see if they noticed me, but I flew back around that corner, and back to the kitchen, and then I sat down and cried, yes, cried like an old fool. First time in years, I guess, but I haven't

felt so like it for that long. Catch me crying if things don't go right. Not much. It was just that — well, I'd known Mark so long, and his happiness meant so much to me, so I just gave up and boo-hooed. And maybe I was just a little bit jealous of Polly, too.

"But I mighty soon brushed away the tears, and I flaxed 'round and got up the swellest supper, and when it was all ready, I went out to call them, and Miss Polly said, 'Why, are you home so soon?' I smiled to myself, and invited them in to supper, and it was the first time Mark had been able to wheel up to the table since he'd been sick. Just seeing them sitting there, and knowing what I did, rattled me so I couldn't fix the tea right, and I called everybody by the wrong names, and made a fool of myself generally. But Mark and Miss Polly didn't seem to notice, and I presume they did have something else to think about.

"After we were all done, Mark wheeled back from the table, and around beside Miss Polly. Then he took her hand and said, 'Mrs. Bell, we want you and Jim to know that we are going to be married soon, but we'd rather it shouldn't be known yet.'

"Jim looked at me so surprised, and I nodded, so he was altogether satisfied that it was all right

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MORNING CALLER

"It was lucky for me that I was busy all the next week after the picnic, getting Frankie's clothes ready for him to go back to school, for I didn't see much of either Miss Polly or Mark. It wasn't their fault in particular, only they seemed to have so many things to talk about, that I didn't like to interrupt. They sat out on the north porch in the shade most of the time, only Miss Polly did help a good deal with the work. And after the first few days, Mark used to go down-town every morning before it got hot, just to get the air, and to see how things was running at the bank. So I had Miss Polly with me then. She began talking about going home the next day after the picnic, but I noticed she didn't get any farther than talking, and so I got to counting on her staying right along.

"One morning I was busy in the kitchen, when I heard a step on the porch. I went to the door and there was Margaret Lee. I knew she had come to

tell me something, so I hustled through the work I was doing, and sat down so we could talk without being disturbed.

"As soon as I got into my chair, she leaned over and said, 'Mrs. Bell, I'm going to marry Ben Parker.' 'Yes,' I said, 'as soon as he gets as much money as you have. I've known that right along.' I thought perhaps she would let Ben off too easy, out of pity for his being sick, and I thought I'd stir her up a little. She owed it to herself to be pretty hard with him after the way he'd treated her, and I did my best to make her think so. I went on, 'So he's got around to asking you, has he? And did he ask you to wait? And does he expect to make his money here in this town, or does he expect to go West again? Well, I'm not so very old, so perhaps I'll live to see you married.' That made her mad, and she burst out, 'Now, Mrs. Bell, you needn't be so mean about Ben. I know he didn't understand all those years that a woman wants to be loved first of all, but he's making up for it now, and he's going to keep on making up for it. You've been so mean that I have a good mind not to tell you another word about our plans. But I do want you to know. In the first place, you do know that I have about ten thousand dollars' worth of property, that store building and the block where the house

is, and some farm land. And Ben hasn't a cent except the third of that claim in Alaska, and he owes Mark Williams for all his doctor's bill and nursing. But he's begun paying that. But now we want you to know, for we know you are interested in us. When Ben first got well enough to write, he wrote to his partners in Alaska offering to sell out to them, but, of course, we haven't heard anything from them yet, and we're not expecting much, anyway. But he wrote to a friend in Seattle, an old circus man that had been mighty good to him, and last night he heard from him. The man wants him, and offers him a hundred dollars a month for a year in his office there. He's interested in a line of coast shipping, and Ben knows that from the ground up. Ben telegraphed he'd take it, and we're going to be married and go to Seattle to live. Now you're responsible for this wedding, and we want you to help plan it, and to come if you possibly can.'

"I wasn't much surprised, for I knew Ben would give up his foolish pride, if once he found she cared for him. I knew if they had made up their minds to be married, there wasn't a bit of use saying a word against it, for neither one of them would change, so I thanked her, and then I told her the plan I had made for Mary and Frank Brown, and asked her if they wanted to be in that. She was delighted

at the idea. No, I can't tell you yet what it is. Nobody knows but just Ben and Margaret, Mary and Frank, Miss Polly and Mark, and I. I'll tell you how it comes out, though.

"Margaret and I talked until Mary came in a few minutes later to do some sewing (she didn't dare do any at home), and then Margaret told Mary, who had guessed it already, and then we all talked plans till dinner-time.

"That afternoon I put on my bonnet and went over to call on 'John Maree's' mother. She was alone, for her daughter had gone along to visit the widow when she went home.

"We had a good talk, and finally got around to the preacher and his not returning. I said something about how sorry I was that I couldn't do as I had planned to do before he went away, and that was to have Mrs. Simms and a lot of the other church women to my house to spend the day. I had hoped to do this, but Mark's being there made it impossible.

"Now Mrs. Higgins is the kind of woman that always, if you say you want to do a thing, wants to do the same thing, so it's the easiest thing in the world to get her to do things. No sooner had I said this, than she immediately said she had had the same idea, and had even talked it to 'John

Maree' before she went away. But if she had the party, and she was sure to, would I come, and what day could I best come? I made out that the only time that I could come was Wednesday next, and then she went on, and made out a list of names, Mrs. Piper, and Mrs. Parker, and Mrs. Simms, and myself, and five others, so there'd be ten of us altogether, and she telephoned to one or two of them right away, and they accepted, and I'd accepted, so she was bound to have it Wednesday, and she sat down and wrote to the rest, and I came past the post-office and mailed the notes, so I know they got off. I knew we'd have a good time, for we always do have when we get about ten of us together. I told her I couldn't get there before one o'clock, and she said she wouldn't have dinner till two, so that would be all right. Of the others, some would come early, Mrs. Parker especially, for she always came early, and if there was quilting on hand she was sure to be there, for she did like to quilt. Then Mrs. Higgins's cook was fine, and she always laid herself out getting up dinner for us. I didn't know what Mrs. Simms would do with the babies, but I thought she could get one of the neighbours' girls to stay with them if Mr. Simms couldn't.

"That reminds me, I'm going to send Mr. and

Mrs. Simms out here Friday to spend the day, as I promised her away long in the spring, and I'll take care of the youngsters that day. They'll have a good time, I know, but what I'll have I can't tell, but I'll tell you about it.

"I expect Frankie will be here to-morrow, for he said he'd be here one day before he goes back to school, and he goes on Thursday. This is his last year, too. Someway, I don't mind his being gone half so much when I know that in another year he'll be home for all the time. Unless, of course, he stays at the hospital for a year. But he'll settle down here to practise inside of two years, anyway, and then no more being away.

"Mark was able to go home this morning, and Miss Polly is down at Margaret's helping her get ready to be married. With Mary and Margaret both sewing, and Miss Polly beginning to think about it, I certainly feel as if I was in the midst of the mating season, only I have to come out here to say anything, for nobody in town knows a thing about it, and I daren't run the risk of its getting out.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to spend to-morrow and next day baking, getting ready for the Simms's, and then when I get over that, I'll be ready to come out here again, but maybe I won't be out before the day at Mrs. Higgins's."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BORROWING THE SIMMS'S

"WELL, Katie, I'm glad to see you lived through your share of the Simms's Friday, for until to-day I wasn't sure that I had. I don't remember that I ever had quite such a time, and I hope I'll never be fool enough again to tackle a job like that.

"To begin with, Mrs. Simms dressed the young ones up when I told her expressly not to, and so they were all cranky to begin with. She must have started in early in the morning to get them ready by the time she did, for I sent Jim down after them about half-past seven, and they were all ready then. Then he took the old horse down right away (I suppose you noticed that he didn't let them use his driving team) so they could start.

"You've never seen the children, I believe, so I'll describe them. First, nearly nine, is Sammy, a regular little preacher's son, and you know what they are. This one has freckled face, straight, sandy hair, white eyebrows, and white eyes, rather

lie any time than tell the truth, and he'll steal if he gets the chance, but I locked everything up that he could possibly carry off. Next is Rachel. She's half-past seven, and looks just like her pa. Same pious face and the same big appetite for yellow-legged chicken and apple pie. Then some of the deviltry seems to have run out, for little Joe, he's six, is one of the nicest little fellows I ever had around. He's got big, blue eyes, and the blackest hair, and he looks up at you just as honest, and there's no sneaking about him. Next is Martha, still Bible names, you see. And she's Sammy all over in looks, and like the Bible one of that name, burdened with many cares, only all her cares now, or that she's ever likely to have, are that she won't find out what somebody else (it doesn't make much difference who) is doing. She's the one I always to myself call Snoopy. If you set a basket down at a picnic, she looks into it. If she sees anybody drive past the parsonage with a box, she'll follow the wagon to see if she can find out what's in the box. Really, they found her clear down by the railroad depot one day, just following a dray to see what was in a box they was hauling. She found out, too, before she came home.

"Last of the children comes little Iola, named for some town where they used to live, and she's

like Joe, just the sort of youngster it's a pleasure to have around, only so shy she will hardly speak at first. The baby you saw, for, I'm happy to say, they didn't leave him at home.

"I'd been baking, with Miss Polly's help, the day before, and I had plenty of substantials, too. Miss Polly said she'd stay at home and help me, and although Mark had gone home, I thought likely he'd be up. Then Mary Parker was doing some little sewing still at our house, so I thought I'd have plenty of help. And I needed it.

"You know Jim can't bear any of the children except little Joe. He would like Iola if she didn't act so scared. He says he ain't going to hit her and he don't want her to act as if he was. But little Joe is just his boy, and no mistake.

"Well, to start with, coming up, little Joe sat with Jim, of course, and held the lines. Oh, no, he didn't drive. There don't any six-year-olds drive Jim's team. In the back seat were Sammy and Rachel and Martha, all dressed up with their best hats and best clothes (Mrs. Simms had been working all summer to get them some new clothes before they went away). Sammy was sitting on the outside, of course, and Rachel, fat, and half-asleep, was in the middle. Little Martha was twisting her neck half-off wondering what was in the wagons they

met, and at last, when she saw a wagon coming a block away, she leaned out so far that her hat fell off. Of course she began yelling and that scared the horses. Jim got them calmed down as soon as he could, but that wasn't for half a block, and after he'd turned around and told that youngster to hush up or he'd throw her after her hat. As soon as he had stopped the horses he told Sammy to get out and go after the hat. Sammy said he wouldn't. He hadn't lost it. Let Martha go. Jim took his lines in his other hand, reached 'round and grabbed Sammy and dropped him out in the dust. 'Now, git,' Jim said, and Sammy got. After Martha was calmed down, and her hat returned to her, Jim drove on, and they got to the house all right. I could see Jim wasn't overly pleased, but I didn't know what had happened till after he'd got back from taking the horse down to the parsonage.

"No sooner were the youngsters in the house, and on the way I noticed Martha stop to look into a box on the porch that was empty, than Rachel said, 'Oh, I smell something good. Can I have some if I'll guess what it is?' Of course I had to say 'Yes,' and she guessed cookies, right the first time, so they began eating. The girls went with me when I went into the buttery to get the cookies, and Martha spied another box. While I was busy

she looked into that and discovered apples, so we added apples to the cookies. By the time they were through these, Jim was back, and he took Joe off to the workshop with him. I tried to send Sammy, too, but he wouldn't take any Jim in his, so I had those four on my hands. I'd told the girls to bring their dolls, and I got out the scrap-bag to give them some pieces, and Martha went with me. Every box she saw in the closet she asked what was in till I told her that little girls weren't supposed to mind anybody's affairs but their own, and that made her cry. Now I never did care much for girls, but crying girls I do despise, so I marched her out on the porch and let her howl. Miss Polly came down and offered to quiet her. I had Rachel and Iola quiet now, and Sammy had disappeared, so I sat down by the window to listen to what was said.

"Miss Polly looked as slick as a tin whistle, just as she always does. She had a little work-bag with her, and she came around the house to pick a rose from the rambler on the porch. She always wears roses, and I know now how it happens Mark has so many in his garden.

"The minute she appeared Martha stopped her crying long enough to see who it was, and then started up again. Miss Polly said, 'Why, Martha, what are you crying for? You'll be sick if you

cry like that.' Martha kept on yelling at the top of her lungs. 'My child,' Miss Polly said, 'do stop. The neighbours will think we're abusing you.' Martha stopped long enough to say, 'What will you give me if I'll stop?' Miss Polly just looked shocked. 'Will you let me see everything in that?' and she pointed to the little work-bag. 'No, indeed,' Miss Polly started to say, but Martha at sound of the 'No,' began again at the top of her lungs, and I guess they were about as high as any lung tops ever heard in that town. At this Miss Polly did just what I wanted her to do, just what I should have done in about one minute. She grabbed Martha and held one hand over her mouth so she couldn't let out the noise, and then calmly sat down in the big rocker and turned that young one over her knee. About three applications stopped the noise effectually. Then Miss Polly looked around to see if any one had seen her. She looked so mortified when she caught my eye that she blushed and stammered when she tried to say something, but I just laughed and told her how glad I was she'd saved me the trouble.

"Just then I heard Jim's voice out at the barn, and I went to the back porch to see what was the matter. And I saw. Jim was holding Sammy by the scruff of the neck and was lashing him around

the legs with the horsewhip, but he was so close it couldn't have hurt much. I never had seen him so mad since I've known him, hardly. He turned Sammy loose, and the boy made a bee-line for the house. Jim came right along behind him, and as they came up the steps, Jim said to him, 'Now, youngster, if you're going to tell, tell the truth, tell how you was chasing my Brahmas with my best buggy whip. Tell how I let you off the first time if you wouldn't do it again. And then tell them I licked you in less than ten minutes for doing the same thing. Now if you come near the barn or workshop again to-day I'll tie you up to a tree and leave you there.' Jim certainly was mad. I never heard him say so much at one time ever before, and when he talks that's a sign he's pretty well stirred up.

"By this time it was dinner-time, and Rachel was happy. They all of them had their appetites with them, and the way the chicken pie and steamed corn bread and apple sauce disappeared you would have thought they hadn't had anything to eat for a month. And yet they certainly had had enough since the pound social.

"As soon as dinner was over, I told them all that all that would sleep some that afternoon we would take some place. Martha asked, 'Where?' the first

thing, and Sammy said, 'Huh, I'm too big to sleep in the daytime. I stay up till ten o'clock sometimes.' Jim said to him, 'You sleep,' and he marched along as meek as pie.

"Iola and Joe I put in one room, for they were both good. Rachel and Martha I put in another, and Sammy I put by himself. Rachel had eaten so much she could hardly move, and went to sleep before she left the table. Busybody Martha was so busy seeing everything to be seen that I thought she'd never get to sleep. I put her in a room where there wasn't any bureau, and thought that she couldn't get the closet door open to snoop there.

"I looked into Sammy's room as I went downstairs, and he seemed to be asleep already.

"After a little while Mary Parker came, and she and Miss Polly and I went up to the other front room where she was doing her sewing, and soon we were all busy.

"It must have been about an hour later when suddenly we heard a bump and yell. We all rushed out into the hall, and we started into the room where Joe and Iola were, but they were sound asleep. Then we turned to where the girls were, and we found Rachel fast asleep, but the closet door was wide open, and yells were coming louder and louder from inside. When we got to the door there we

saw Martha hanging head down from a big overcoat that hung on the wall. For a second I couldn't see how she got in that position, but by the time we got her foot out of the overcoat pocket, I knew. She had got the closet door open, and, finding nothing in the lower part she could snoop into, she had seen the rows of attractive-looking boxes and baskets on the top shelf. By putting a stool on the big chest, she had managed to get a hold of a hook, and then she had put her foot in the pocket for a step. She reached up higher and got hold of a nail, but that pulled out and threw plaster-dust in her eyes, so she let go the hook and came down ker-bump. She wasn't hurt much, only scared, and her leg bruised a little. I haven't had any chance to see, but I do hope it taught her a lesson.

"Little greedy Rachel slept right through it all, and never waked even when we put Martha back on the bed with her. Before I went back to the sewing-room I thought I'd look in and see how Sammy was. I looked, but he wasn't. The bed was rumpled up but there wasn't a sign of him. The window was open, of course, and one of the screens was pushed out. I crawled out there and looked clear around the porch. I wouldn't call him for I thought it better to catch him without his seeing me. At last, when I'd gone clear around the porch roof, I

saw the lightning-rod shake, and I peeped up over the roof of the house and there on the tiptop stood Sammy leaning against the chimney and shaking the lightning-rod to make the vane turn. I watched him a minute and he got tired of that, and began picking pieces of mortar out of the chimney and throwing them at the sparrows. As soon as I saw that I yelled at him, 'Sammy, stop that. Come down from there.' He grinned, and pulled out another piece and threw it at me. That made me mad, but I knew I couldn't do a thing with him up there, so I began thinking what to do.

"Mary had seen me pass the window, and she came out now to see what I was doing on the porch roof. I told her, and said, 'Go after Jim. Tell him to come here quick.' She started, and I heard Sammy kicking his heels on the shingles, and I thought right quick that I wasn't going to have Jim have to go up on that roof, and probably fall and break a leg, just to replace the shingles that little imp had split, so I hurried after Mary and told her to tell Jim to bring the shotgun and the old pistol.

"In about two minutes, and all the time that youngster kept shaking the lightning-rod, and banging his heels against the shingles (he'd put on his shoes again so he could make more noise), and I was getting madder and madder, Jim and Mary

came back. I showed Jim the youngster sitting up there, grinning and banging his heels, and shying chunks of mortar at us, and Jim got so mad he was black in the face. 'Sammy, come down from that,' he said. Sammy just grinned. Jim poked the gun up then, and said, 'If you don't come down I'll shoot.' Sammy looked scared, but he got up and crawled over the ridge-pole and hid behind the chimney, and then yelled, 'Shoot away.' I was expecting this, so I grabbed the pistol and skipped around the house to the other side of the porch, and pushed that big pistol up over the edge of the roof. 'Sammy, come down,' I said. He looked and saw the pistol and then began to climb over the ridge-pole, but there was the gun pointing at him, and he crawled back to my side. I said again, 'Sammy, come down,' and I pointed that pistol right at him. It wasn't loaded, but I hoped he wouldn't guess that. I was standing right below him, and just as I pointed that pistol I heard the gun go off on the other side of the house. I was scared half to death and yelled, but Sammy yelled worse and let go the chimney, and began sliding right toward me. I knew he wasn't hurt for there wasn't anything in the gun but powder (Jim didn't have a bit of shot), but he came sliding down, sticking in his finger-nails and yelling. It takes longer to

tell it than it took for him to get down so his foot hit the tin eaves-trough, and when his foot hit that, I grabbed him, and lifted him down, and when Jim and Mary came around the corner a minute later Sammy was still yelling, and I was using my slipper for the purpose slippers were meant for, and I was mighty glad for once that I have big feet. Jim took him by the ear, and when he got him downstairs he repeated the dose, and Jim's hands are as big as hams, and I'll bet Sammy's eating standing yet.

"By this time all the youngsters was awake, and Rachel was ready to eat again. Then we all started for a ride. We was going to take them down to see a gipsy camp, but Sammy ran off as soon as he could get outdoors, so Miss Polly and the other four and I started out, but when we got where it had been they were gone, so Jim drove around for a while, enough so they wasn't very disappointed.

"But, now, Katie, that my duty is done, and my promise kept about taking the Simms's young ones one day so as to rest Mrs. Simms, if you ever catch me doing a thing like that again, I want you to send me straight to an asylum without even an examination, and let me tell you, too, if your children ever get to be snoops like Martha, pigs like

Rachel, or little devils like Sammy, I'll feel like thrashing you. I don't care if you have sixteen young ones, there's no excuse for letting any of them grow up like those three."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PARKER SURPRISE

"It's over now, Katie, and I'm glad of it. I had the burden of the whole thing on my mind, and it was no light load.

"I told you when I was out here before about our being invited to the Higgins's to spend the day on Wednesday, and that I wouldn't be able to get there till one o'clock. Now I'll tell you why.

"I got there just at one o'clock, but I tell you it hurried me to do it. There was Mrs. Simms, and Mrs. Parker, and enough others to make just ten when I got there. There was some wonder when I came why I was so late, but I didn't explain, and we soon had dinner. Now I wasn't in the mood for eating, and I wasn't very hungry, either.

"After dinner, and we had a swell one, too, we went back to the lawn, where it was shady and cool, and soon we were all at work, or busy talking, and so the time passed till about five o'clock. I was

nearly dying to talk, but I didn't say anything hardly, the first time in years I've kept so quiet.

"At last, just about five, the boy that carries the little daily paper came around the corner of the house. He handed it to the woman that sat nearest to him (that was Mrs. Parker) and she opened it and said, 'I suppose there ain't any news. There never is.' She shook out the little four-page paper, and said, 'Well, this looks interesting.' Then she settled her glasses on her nose and began, 'DOUBLE WEDDING!!' She didn't get any farther, but she looked up at me as if she would eat me up, then up she got and walked into the house, tearing the paper all to bits, and scattering them along the walk. We heard her slam the door, and poor Mrs. Higgins ran after her, but before she got on to the porch Mrs. Parker had on her bonnet, and was coming out the door. Without a word she stalked off down the walk and Mrs. Higgins came back to us most ready to cry.

"Everybody was asking me questions then, and some of them had begun to patch together the little scraps of paper, but they might as well have tried to put the smoke from the chimney together to make the chips that was burned. I wouldn't say a word till Mrs. Higgins got back, and then I made up for lost time. They all gathered up close around

me, and I told them all just what had happened, how there'd been a double wedding at the Parkers', Mary and Frank Brown, and Margaret Lee and Ben Parker, and told them just what was in the paper. Having told the editor myself I ought to have known what he put in.

"And now I'm going to tell you what I told them and a great deal more.

"Just as soon as I'd got Mrs. Higgins to give that dinner, and I knew Mrs. Parker would be there, I told Mary and Frank Brown that the time had come to carry out my plan. Since they wouldn't run away from home to be married, the only thing for them to do was to be married when Mrs. Parker wasn't at home, and this would be the time. Of course Mr. Simms didn't want to have Mrs. Parker mad at him about it, but when Frank said, very politely, 'All right, sir, there are other ministers,' he thought of the fee and of his moving expenses, and he consented. Mary had done most of her sewing at my house, and Margaret had been in and helped her, and when Ben got his job at Seattle, he began to talk getting married, and to my surprise they decided to get married at the same time. Mark Williams knew the county clerk pretty well, so he granted the licenses and kept his mouth shut. So everything was arranged, and finally

about nine o'clock Wednesday morning Mrs. Parker left the house.

"In ten minutes the younger children, except Willie, were sent off for the day (I had arranged that), and then Mary told Jennie. She was mad for a minute or so, but I took hold of her when I got there, and in five minutes she was as busy as any of them, hustling around and getting things fixed up. I took her into the kitchen with me, and Mary and Ben decorated the parlour with flowers that Mark Williams had sent around. Miss Polly was over at the Lees' helping Margaret get the last bit done on her travelling dress. Margaret's sister, Mary, is no earthly good except to play the piano or organ. And her mother isn't well enough to help much. I saw to it that things kept on moving, for we had a pile to do before twelve o'clock, which was the time set for the wedding. Jim was flying around, carrying flowers and running errands, and, after everything was ready, hauling the trunks to the station.

"At last Jennie and I had the dinner all fixed, and the parlour was all decorated, and Jim had brought Mrs. Lee and Margaret and Mary Lee and Miss Polly over, and Frank was there, and Mark had come, and then Tommy Parker didn't show up. Jim and Frank drove down to the store while we

women-folks got Mary into her travelling dress, which, like everything else she had, she'd bought out of her own earnings as bookkeeper at one of the stores in town. Then, too, she had to have on

> "'Something old, and something new,
> Something borrowed, something blue.'

They were both mighty particular about that.

"Frank broke the news to Tommy on the way up, and he seemed all broken up. He didn't say much, but I know that he felt that the children had no business getting married without their mother's being there, at least, even if she didn't consent. He held Willie all the time during the service, and I could see how much they thought of each other, and I could understand how he could stand the things he had to.

"Mr. Simms they brought along, too, and he was as beaming over his two fees as if he hadn't left the whole lot of children at home alone to set the parsonage on fire, as like as not.

"I sat next to Mrs. Lee, and she told me how much she liked Ben Parker. Of course she was greatly surprised to find he cared for Margaret, or she for him, but he had been so nice and thoughtful these last few weeks, and while, of course, it seemed

rather hurried, Margaret had always had her own way pretty much, and her mother wouldn't think of opposing her. I could see by that that Ben had taken my advice about wooing, and had included the whole family.

"At last everything was ready, and just before twelve the preacher stood up, and Mary Lee went to the organ. We stood like this, first Jim, then I, then Mrs. Lee, then Tommy and Willie, then Mark in his chair. Miss Polly and Jennie were to come in and stand up with the two couples.

"While Mary played they came in from the hallway, and in a minute or two it was all over and we were congratulating them, but I hope, oh, how I hope, that it didn't seem to Mary like it seemed to me. It hardly seemed as if a wedding without the girl's mother, the one to whom she ought to owe everything, the one to whom she ought to look for everything, and who ought to stand for everything good, it hardly seemed as if it was a real wedding. But the others didn't seem to think anything about it except poor Tommy Parker.

"Then we all ate a lunch, the one Jennie and I had fixed up, and it was good. As soon as that was over, Jim took the Lees home. They didn't want to go to the train. It was pitiful to see Mrs. Lee bid Margaret good-bye. I'm thankful I haven't

any girls to go off and get married, and leave us for somebody else that doesn't care half so much for them.

"The train they were going on came at ten minutes to one, so we all hurried a little and drove down to the depot in hacks and carriages. There weren't any tickets to get, for Frank and Ben had seen to that, but we wanted to be sure of being on time, as the train is hardly ever late.

"A number of folks had seen the bustle, and had put two and two together, and so they were down to the depot to see the new brides and grooms, and they were a fine-looking lot. They were going together as far as New Berlin, and from there Ben and his wife (how proud he was of that word as I heard him introduce some friend) were going on to Seattle, and Frank and Mary were coming back to their new home after a week on the lake.

"Thank goodness, there wasn't any rice throwing, for of all things that's the most foolish, but they got safely on to the train, which got off in time. We drove back to leave Miss Polly, who was to stay with Jennie and help clean up, and Jim drove me around to Higgins's, and I got there just at one.

"Tommy went back to the store with Mark, and I know whatever Mark said would do him good.

"Part of this I told the women at the Higgins's, but they had so much to say and ask about the travelling dresses, and so on, that I didn't get near done before Jim came after me. Those things I'll tell you later. There's no hurry about them.

"Mrs. Parker I haven't seen since, but Mark told me last night that she'd been around to see him, and she seemed in such a forgiving spirit, that even he admitted he was surprised. And I sha'n't be much surprised if she treats me pretty much as she did before, from what he says she says. I do hope so. I don't like to make people dislike me, but there are certain things I'll do if I run the risk of making everybody in town dislike me, and one of those is to help young people be happy if they want to be happy and I can help them."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARK'S SURPRISE

As soon as the townspeople knew that Mark Williams was getting better, and was sure, with ordinary care, to recover, they began to plan a surprise on him. A few of the church people went ahead with the matter, and they went to Mrs. Jim to ask her to join them.

"No, indeed," she told them, "I made it a rule long years ago never to help get up a surprise party on any one. If they enjoy it, it's all right, but nine times out of ten they don't like it, and the one who plans it gets the blame. Now, I'll help all you want, but no going ahead for me."

The others proceeded, however, and soon the matter was taken from their hands by the townspeople in general, who showed such a desire to join in that the affair reached a magnitude undreamed of by the originators.

When the surprise was fully planned, the committee in charge did come to Mrs. Jim to get her

help in keeping Mark out of the way. Miss Polly was still with her, and an invitation to tea was accepted with alacrity. The arrangement was also made that Mr. Bell was to drive down to the bank for him, for he had resumed work, and the boy who worked at the bank could wheel the chair up to the house.

As Mark was to leave with Mr. Simms to attend the district conference on Monday, as lay delegate, the committee had decided to have the surprise on the preceding Thursday.

As soon as he had left his home on that day the committee, which was made up of prominent citizens and members of all the churches in the town, gathered at Mark's house and began to decorate. Lanterns and bunting and flags outdoors, and goldenrod and dahlias and asters inside, changed the looks of the whole house.

Refreshments for the several hundred people who were expected were brought to the house, and the kitchen and pantry were filled with the cakes and confections provided for the entertainment.

Mrs. Jim and Miss Polly kept Mark until about eight o'clock, and then the three started down the street toward Mark's house. Mrs. Jim was busily talking as usual, but the others felt no need for speech, busied, as they were, with their own

thoughts. Mrs. Jim's observing eye did not fail to notice how protectingly Miss Polly's hand rested on the arm of the chair, or even at times on Mark's arm, but she was too well pleased to make any comment on it.

Half-suppressed sounds of laughter from Mark's house came to them, but he only remarked, "I didn't know there was any social on this street to-night," and they went on. It was not until they turned in at his own gate that Mark realized that something was afoot. Then, just as he turned to enter, a whistle was heard, and, with a flash, the electric lighted lanterns, which the town light company's men had been hurrying so to get up, were lighted, and the militia company's band, stationed on the side porch, burst into the strains of "Hail to the Chief." Mark turned to Mrs. Jim, and said, "You did this," and would not believe her when she denied it. Then he was surrounded by the happy crowd and carried, wheel-chair and all, up on the broad porch.

From this point Mrs. Jim described it to Mrs. Jimmie, and we'll take her account of it.

"I never saw such a happy crowd in all my life. Everybody there was determined to have a good time, and I guess they had it. Miss Polly and I were swept up on to the porch with the others, and

pretty soon somebody pushed us here and shoved us there, till there was about half a dozen of us in line bowing and receiving everybody, and passing them down the line. They put me at the head of the line, for I guess I knew every one, then I handed them over to the preacher, and he passed them on to Mark, and Miss Polly and somebody else passed them off the porch at the other side. Oh, it was a grand affair, and we put on airs, calling each other 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' that had been 'Maria' and 'Tom' and 'Will' and 'Sue' for twenty years, but the formality was all put on, and everybody took it all as a joke.

"About a dozen I'd passed along, and they was coming slow enough so I had a chance to say a word or two to everybody, when who should be in the line but Maria Parker. I didn't expect she'd speak to me, but I got all ready to be nice to her even if it did come hard. But when she got up to me, she put out her hand and said, 'What afternoon will you be at home? I want you to tell me all about *it*.' I knew what she meant, and I was so glad she wasn't mad that I said, 'Come to-morrow, and spend the day, and have Tommy and the children come to dinner.' And she did come, and, thank goodness, she's all over her ill feelings, and pretty well pleased with the whole business. She'd had

letters from Ben and Margaret, and from Frank and Mary, and she expects to go to Waterville on a visit in October. I'm so relieved, but then I did my duty, and if she didn't like it, she could lump it, that's all.

"But to go back to Mark's. At last we'd introduced everybody, and Joe Wilkins five times over, for he'd get back into line and give a different name, and, of course, we had to pass him on. First he was 'Mr. J. C. Wilkins,' then 'Joe Wilkins,' then 'Mr. Joseph Chauncey Wilkins,' then 'Wilkins & Company,' then I don't know what all. Then there was some of them that played games, and it was fun to see Monroe, the assistant superintendent of the Sunday school, and Joe Wilkins flying around, playing 'Drop the handkerchief' and 'Pussy wants a corner.' There were lots that just sat and talked. Pretty soon they began to pass refreshments, and we had cake and ice-cream, and candy, and apples, and pop-corn, and everybody enjoyed that part of it.

"After the eating was over, there was something else coming, and everybody was waiting for that. At last all were through, and the things were picked up, and all the folks were sitting around the big porch. Then the county judge got up. He's a fine old man, and every one likes to hear him talk.

He began, 'My friends, I didn't come here to make a speech. This isn't election year, so I'm not saying much, but I have been asked to say a few words.' Turning to Mark, he went on, 'As soon as we townspeople knew you were sick, even before we knew how seriously ill you were, it came to us as it had never come before, as it might never have come but for this sickness, that you were the one person in this town whose place could not be filled.' I was sitting next to Miss Polly and I saw her wipe her eyes and kind of half sob under her breath. 'For that reason,' he went on, 'as soon as we knew you were going to get well, we began casting about for some means of expressing our feelings for you. And we finally hit upon this,' and he stepped to the door into the hall and wheeled out the most beautiful wheel-chair I ever saw. 'Since you have to use a wheel-chair, since you have made what is so often a bench of sorrow the seat of the comforter, we want you to have the best chair that can be obtained. Will you accept this from your townspeople?'

"Mark wheeled his old chair out beside the other, and, oh, what a difference there was, the one, shabby, rough, and uncomfortable, the new one padded, rubber-tired, beautifully finished, but not gaudy. A dozen hands were ready when he asked

for help, and in a second he was in the new chair. Then he wheeled along the porch and back, turned toward the people, and began very slowly, 'My people, I haven't the words to thank you for this expression of your interest in me. I can't say very much, for it's easier just to be thankful to you all than it is to say the thanks. But,' and he sat up proudly, 'all these years I have known you, you have come to me with your sorrows and I have tried to make it easier for you to bear them.' I could see people getting out their handkerchiefs. 'But you have shared with me your joys as well, and now — I want to share with you a little of my joy.' He wheeled over in front of us and leaned over and whispered to Miss Polly, 'I'm going to tell them.' She smiled, and put her hand in his, and he, still holding her hand, wheeled to the edge of the porch. And there she stood beside him, and the crowd didn't wait for him to tell them, but they just shouted so you could have heard them clear out here. When at last they quieted down, he said, 'I see you've guessed. Miss Hawkins and I are old sweethearts, only she doesn't show her age, and I do. For twenty years we've been sweethearts, but we didn't find it out till Mrs. Bell helped us, but now we want you to know that we are to be married, and we want you to know, too, that we will be just

as willing to share your sorrows and your joys as you are willing to share our joy.' "

By this time Mrs. Jim had recourse to her handkerchief. "Why, Katie," she said, "I wouldn't have minded it so much if he hadn't brought me in, but when I thought what if I hadn't written that letter, why — I — I — I skipped into the house, and I didn't come out till they was nearly all gone. Then I went out to say 'good-bye' to Mrs. Parker, and when everybody had gone but just Jim and Polly and I, I walked him off down to the gate so they could have a chance to say 'good night' without anybody to disturb them."

When Mark and Polly had said "Good night," and she had gone down the walk to the gate where Mrs. Jim was waiting, Mark wheeled his new chair in through the wide hall door, then pushing the old chair ahead of him he wheeled on into his room, where the housekeeper, on retiring, had left the light burning as usual.

He wheeled the old chair out into the centre of the room, then sat and looked at it, and from it to the fine finish of the new one. Long he sat there thinking. There was the old chair, the chair that he had run into debt for when first taken sick, the chair that for more than twenty years had carried him to and from work, to and from church, the old

chair that was a part of his old life, the chair that he sat in when he had driven Polly away, the chair he had sat in when Polly's love had come back to him. All these things he thought and many more. Then he wheeled the old chair up in front of the big couch, wheeled the new chair up beside it, swung himself by his hands to the couch, and, grasping the arms of the new chair, he sent it spinning across the room till it landed in the far corner by the bed. Smiling, he put his hands on the old accustomed arms, and swung lightly into the chair. Patting the worn old leather arms as if caressing the hand of some tried, true friend, he wheeled rapidly around the room, lowering curtains, winding the little clock on the dresser, and blowing out the light. At last, wheeling the chair up beside the bed, he swung from it to the bed, and began to take off his coat.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

"YESTERDAY was Simms's last Sunday as preacher, so nearly everybody was at church. They all like him, for he is mighty good on sermons sometimes, and they thought, since it was his last, that they'd hear something extra special. Of course there were some that didn't like him, but they went that day to hear how much the church still owed him, so they could crow over those who did like him about not being able and willing to support a minister even if they did like him.

"But Mark Williams had seen to that, and while he was getting well, and everybody had been coming to see him, he had taken the chance to stir them all up on the salary question, till now there wasn't one cent due that man, and I think that was the first preacher that could be said about in that town in years. Usually the last minute after a preacher went to conference some of the trustees had to go

down in their pockets and make up the last hundred dollars or so.

"We had a mighty fine sermon on a text from the Psalms, one of the sweet, helpful kind, that make you feel good all over, and make you feel like being nice to everybody.

"But the queerest thing happened. When Mr. Simms got up to read the notices before the collection was taken, he read about quilting at the usual time at the church, and missionary society meeting at Mrs. Davis's, and prayer-meeting Wednesday evening, and that there'd be no preaching next Sunday because of conference, but that Sunday school would be held at the usual time, and then he gave this notice. 'I am requested to invite all members and friends of the church to stay to Sunday school to-day for a particular reason. It is not that an unusual collection is desired, though the usual offering will be taken, but it is believed that this session will particularly interest every one of you, and that you may be sorely disappointed if you do not remain.'

"Of course this stirred up every one's curiosity, and I heard people all 'round me asking each other if they knew what was doing. Mrs. Parker leaned over and asked me (she'd quite gotten over being mad at me) and I let her see that I knew. I wasn't

going to let any one think I didn't know if it would give her anything to worry about to have me know. Even if I hadn't known, I don't believe in letting folks think that I don't know everything that's going on, and I don't have to fool them very often, for if you keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and put two and two together, you can keep pretty well up with the times.

"The sermon was mighty good, but everybody was fidgeting so, waiting for Sunday school, that I don't think half of them heard a bit of it. Some of them was thinking about how late their dinners would be, and hoping the stuff in their ovens for dinner wouldn't spoil, and yet they wasn't giving one thought to going home before Sunday school, for they wouldn't have missed whatever was coming for a good deal.

"At last church was out, and it didn't take very long for the people to clear out. Everybody wanted to stay and talk about what was going to happen, and everybody else wanted to hurry up and get down-stairs to the Sunday school room. Yes, indeed, we have a Sunday school room. Didn't the women-folks of that church scrimp, and save, and quilt, and sew, and give dinners and suppers and fairs so as to finish up that up-stairs room for preaching, and then they had to have a bigger

preacher to fit the church, and a bigger, nicer parsonage to fit the preacher, and all sorts of things to fit the parsonage, so they had to hustle for years, till they're just about quilted and suppered out, raising money. But we're out of debt now, thank goodness and Mark Williams. For he worked right with the women-folks on that debt, shaving it here, and cutting it there, and squeezing down interest all around. It certainly was fine for us having a bank cashier for church treasurer.

"Well, I'll go back to Sunday school now. At last we all got seated, and I never saw that room fuller. Every class was packed, and the Bible class back in our corner was so big that it crowded out three other classes. We could hardly wait, but Mark started the school just as usual, and it went along till after the lesson was over. Then, instead of having the report read, Mark wheeled his chair down off the platform, and the preacher stood up. Everybody kept just as still, though they could hardly wait to find out what was coming.

"Suddenly the girl at the organ began playing, and we saw Mark wheeling his chair down the centre aisle. As he came right toward where we was sitting, I never saw a more handsome head than his. His head was thrown back and his face was so lighted that I couldn't but think of some pictures

I'd seen of Christ, with the light of love shining in his eyes. And then every one knew, when he stopped where Polly Hawkins was sitting by the class she had taken for the day, and she got up, and, laying her hand on his arm, walked up the aisle beside his chair to the front of the church.

"Then, with all his friends, and those who had worked with him and loved him for years, around him, Mark Williams was married, and I never saw or hope to see a wedding where everybody felt so happy as that one. It was so different, and yet it was just what Mark ought to have had. After all he had suffered, after all he had done for others, then at last to be married to the woman he had loved so long, and to be married among his friends in the Sunday school where he had been superintendent for years, was just fitting.

"After the preacher had finished, before any one could leave his seat, Mark swung his chair around facing the crowd, and holding his wife's hand in his, he began, and Polly joined in in a sweet alto, and then everybody else joined in in all sorts of voices, all kind of full of sobs, and yet so happy:

"'Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.'

"Then the preacher, holding out his hands over the two in front of him, pronounced the benediction, 'May the grace of our Lord be and remain with you, now and for ever. Amen.'"

THE END.

L. C. Page and Company's Announcement List of New Fiction

The Flight of Georgiana

A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF THE YOUNG PRETENDER. By ROBERT NEILSON STEPHENS, author of "The Bright Face of Danger," "An Enemy to the King," "The Mystery of Murray Davenport," etc.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative, illustrated . . $1.50

Mr. Stephens's novels all bear the hall-mark of success, for his men are always live, his women are always worthy of their cavaliers, and his adventures are of the sort to stir the most sluggish blood without overstepping the bounds of good taste.

The theme of the new novel is one which will give Mr. Stephens splendid scope for all the powers at his command. The career of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" was full of romance, intrigue, and adventure; his life was a series of episodes to delight the soul of a reader of fiction, and Mr. Stephens is to be congratulated for his selection of such a promising subject.

Mrs. Jim and Mrs. Jimmie

By STEPHEN CONRAD, author of "The Second Mrs. Jim."

Library 12mo, cloth decorative, illustrated . . $1.50

This new book is in a sense a sequel to "The Second Mrs. Jim," since it gives further glimpses of that delightful stepmother and her philosophy. This time, however, she divides the field with "Mrs. Jimmie," who is quite as attractive in her different way. The book has more plot than the former volume, a little less philosophy perhaps, but just as much wholesome fun. In many ways it is a stronger book, and will therefore take an even firmer hold on the public.

The Story of Red Fox

Told by CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS, author of "The Watchers of the Trails," "The Kindred of the Wild," "Barbara Ladd," etc.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative, with fifty illustrations and cover design by Charles Livingston Bull . . . $2.00

Mr. Roberts's reputation as a scientifically accurate writer, whose literary skill transforms his animal stories into masterpieces, stands unrivalled in his particular field.

This is his first long animal story, and his romance of Red Fox, from babyhood to patriarchal old age, makes reading more fascinating than any work of fiction. In his hands Red Fox becomes a personality so strong that one entirely forgets he is an animal, and his haps and mishaps grip you as do those of a person.

Mr. Bull, as usual, fits his pictures to the text as hand to glove, and the ensemble becomes a book as near perfection as it is possible to attain.

Return

A STORY OF THE SEA ISLANDS IN 1739. By ALICE MACGOWAN and GRACE MACGOWAN COOKE, authors of "The Last Word," etc. With six illustrations by C. D. Williams.

Library 12mo, cloth $1.50

A new romance, undoubtedly the best work yet done by Miss MacGowan and Mrs. Cooke. The heroine of "Return," Diana Chaters, is the belle of the Colonial city of Charles Town, S. C., in the early eighteenth century, and the hero is a young Virginian of the historical family of Marshall. The youth, beauty, and wealth of the fashionable world, which first form the environment of the romance, are pictured in sharp contrast to the rude and exciting life of the frontier settlements in the Georgia Colony, and the authors have missed no opportunities for telling characterizations. But "Return" is, above all, a *love-story*.

We quote the opinion of Prof. Charles G. D. Roberts, who has read the advance sheets: "It seems to me a story of quite unusual strength and interest, full of vitality and crowded with telling characters. I greatly like the authors' firm, bold handling of their subject."

Lady Penelope

By MORLEY ROBERTS, author of "Rachel Marr," "The Promotion of the Admiral," etc. With nine illustrations by Arthur W. Brown.

Library 12mo, cloth $1.50

Mr. Roberts certainly has versatility, since this book has not a single point of similarity with either "Rachel Marr" or his well-known sea stories. Its setting is the English so-called "upper crust" of the present day. Lady Penelope is quite the most up-to-date young lady imaginable and equally charming. As might be expected from such a heroine, her *automobiling* plays an important part in the development of the plot. Lady Penelope has a large number of suitors, and her method of choosing her husband is original and provocative of delightful situations and mirthful incidents.

The Winged Helmet

By HAROLD STEELE MACKAYE, author of "The Panchronicon," etc. With six illustrations by H. C. Edwards.

Library 12mo, cloth $1.50

When an author has an original theme on which to build his story, ability in construction of unusual situations, skill in novel characterization, and a good literary style, there can be no doubt but that his work is worth reading. "The Winged Helmet" is of this description.

The author gives in this novel a convincing picture of life in the early sixteenth century, and the reader will be delighted with its originality of treatment, freshness of plot, and unexpected climaxes.

A Captain of Men

By E. ANSON MORE.

Library 12mo, cloth, illustrated $1.50

A tale of Tyre and those merchant princes whose discovery of the value of tin brought untold riches into the country and afforded adventures without number to those daring seekers for the mines. Merodach, the Assyrian, Tanith, the daughter of the richest merchant of Tyre, Miriam, her Hebrew slave, and the dwarf Hiram, who was the greatest artist of his day, are a quartette of characters hard to surpass in individuality. It has been said that the powerful order of Free Masons first had its origin in the meetings which were held at Hiram's studio in Tyre, where gathered together the greatest spirits of that age and place.

The Paradise of the Wild Apple

By RICHARD LEGALLIENNE, author of "Old Love Stories Retold," "The Quest of the Golden Girl," etc.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative $1.50

The theme of Mr. LeGallienne's new romance deals with the instinct of wildness in human nature, — the wander spirit and impatience of tame domesticity, the preference for wild flowers and fruits, and the glee in summer storms and elemental frolics. A wild apple-tree, high up in a rocky meadow, is symbolic of all this, and Mr. LeGallienne works out in a fashion at once imaginative and serious the romance of a young man well placed from the view of worldly goods and estate, who suddenly hungers for the "wild apples" of his youth. The theme has limitless possibilities, and Mr. LeGallienne is artist enough to make adequate use of them.

The Grapple

Library 12mo, cloth decorative $1.50

This story of a strike in the coal mines of Pennsylvania gives both sides of the question, — the Union and its methods, and the non-Union workers and their loyal adherents, with a final typical clash at the end. The question is an absorbing one, and it is handled fearlessly.

For the present at least "The Grapple" will be issued anonymously.

Brothers of Peril

By THEODORE ROBERTS, author of "Hemming the Adventurer."

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"Brothers of Peril" has an unusual plot, dealing with a now extinct race, the Beothic Indians of the sixteenth century, who were the original inhabitants of Newfoundland when that island was merely a fishing-station for the cod-seeking fleets of the old world.

The story tells of the adventures of a young English cavalier, who, left behind by the fleet, finds another Englishman, with his daughter and servants, who is hiding from the law. A French adventurer and pirate, who is an unwelcome suitor for the daughter, plays an important part. Encounters between the Indians and the small colony of white men on shore, and perilous adventures at sea with a shipload of pirates led by the French buccaneer, make a story of breathless interest.

The Black Barque

By T. JENKINS HAINS, author of "The Wind Jammers," "The Strife of the Sea," etc. With five illustrations by W. Herbert Dunton.

Library 12mo, cloth $1.50

According to a high naval authority who has seen the advance sheets, this is one of the best sea stories ever offered to the public. "The Black Barque" is a story of slavery and piracy upon the high seas about 1815, and is written with a thorough knowledge of deep-water sailing. This, Captain Hains's first long sea story, realistically pictures a series of stirring scenes at the period of the destruction of the exciting but nefarious traffic in slaves, in the form of a narrative by a young American lieutenant, who, by force of circumstances, finds himself the gunner of "The Black Barque."

Cameron of Lochiel

Translated from the French of PHILIPPE AUBERT DE GASPÉ by PROF. CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative $1.50

The publishers are gratified to announce a new edition of a book by this famous author, who may be called the Walter Scott of Canada. This interesting and valuable romance is fortunate in having for its translator Professor Roberts, who has caught perfectly the spirit of the original. The French edition first appeared under the title of "Les Anciens Canadiens" in 1862, and was later translated and appeared in an American edition now out of print.

Patriotism, devotion to the French-Canadian nationality, a just pride of race, and a loving memory for his people's romantic and heroic past, are the dominant chords struck by the author throughout the story.

Castel del Monte

By NATHAN GALLIZIER. Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

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A powerful romance of the fall of the Hohenstaufen dynasty in Italy, and the overthrow of Manfred by Charles of Anjou, the champion of Pope Clement IV. The Middle Ages are noted for the weird mysticism and the deep fatalism characteristic of a people believing in signs and portents and the firm hand of fate. Mr. Gallizier has brought out these characteristics in a marked degree.

Slaves of Success

By ELLIOTT FLOWER, author of "The Spoilsmen," etc. With twenty illustrations by different artists.

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Another striking book by Mr. Flower, whose work is already so well known, both through his long stories and his contributions to *Collier's*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, etc. Like his first success, "The Spoilsmen," it deals with politics, but in the broader field of state and national instead of municipal. The book has recently appeared in condensed form as a serial in *Collier's Magazine*, where it attracted widespread attention, and the announcement of its appearance in book form will be welcomed by Mr. Flower's rapidly increasing audience. The successful delineation of characters like John Wade, Ben Carroll, Azro Craig, and Allen Sidway throws new strong lights on the inside workings of American business and political "graft."

Silver Bells

By COL. ANDREW C. P. HAGGARD, author of "Hannibal's Daughter," "Louis XIV. in Court and Camp," etc. With cover design and frontispiece by Charles Livingston Bull.

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Under the thin veneer of conventionality and custom lurks in many hearts the primeval instinct to throw civilization to the winds and hark back to the ways of the savages in the wilderness, and it often requires but a mental crisis or an emotional upheaval to break through the coating. Geoffrey Digby was such an one, who left home and kindred to seek happiness among the Indians of Canada, in the vast woods which always hold an undefinable mystery and fascination. He gained renown as a mighty hunter, and the tale of his life there, and the romance which awaited him, will be heartily enjoyed by all who like a good love-story with plenty of action not of the "stock" order. "Silver Bells," the Indian girl, is a perfect "child of nature."

Selections from L. C. Page and Company's List of Fiction

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Not since the absorbing adventures of D'Artagnan have we had anything so good in the blended vein of romance and comedy. The beggar student, the rich goldsmith, the roisterer and the rake, the fop and the maid, are all here: foremost among them Captain Ravenshaw himself, soldier of fortune and adventurer, who, after escapades of binding interest, finally wins a way to fame and to matrimony.

Philip Winwood. (70th thousand.) A Sketch of the Domestic History of an American Captain in the War of Independence, embracing events that occurred between and during the years 1763 and 1785 in New York and London. Written by his Enemy in War, Herbert Russell, Lieutenant in the Loyalist Forces. Presented anew by ROBERT NEILSON STEPHENS. Illustrated by E. W. D Hamilton.
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"This is easily the best thing that Mr. Stephens has yet done. Those familiar with his other novels can best judge the measure of this praise, which is generous." — *Buffalo News.*

"Mr. Stephens won a host of friends through his earlier volumes, but we think he will do still better work in his new field if the present volume is a criterion." — *N. Y. Com. Advertiser.*

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An historical romance of the sixteenth century, describing the adventures of a young French nobleman at the Court of Henry III., and on the field with Henry of Navarre.

"A stirring tale." — *Detroit Free Press.*

"A royally strong piece of fiction."— *Boston Ideas.*

"Interesting from the first to the last page." — *Brooklyn Eagle.*

"Brilliant as a play; it is equally brilliant as a romantic novel." — *Philadelphia Press.*

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